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Number IV

A TRUCE IN THE TRADES

HOW THE AGREEMENT KNOWN AS THE PROTOCOL HAS BROUGHT
A NEW AND BETTER ERA IN NEW YORK'S CHIEF
MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY

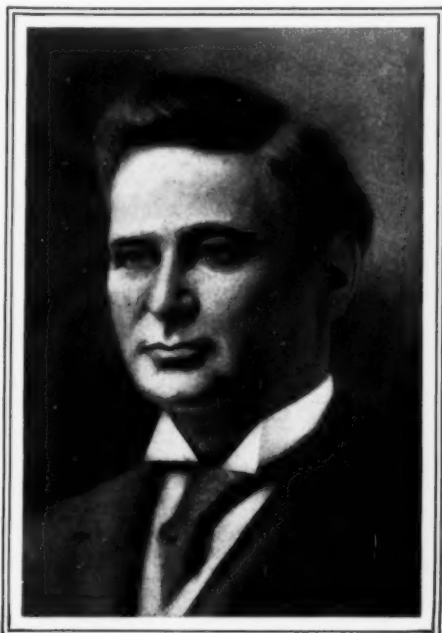
BY ISAAC F. MARCOSSON

OUT of the turmoil which raged for years in the garment industry in New York has emerged a remarkable agency for labor pacification. Termed, by some happy inspiration, the Protocol, it seems to offer the sanest and fairest solu-

tion yet conceived for any important phase of our most vexing and disturbing problem. It is as many-sided as it is useful, for it has brought a truce to a troubled trade, set up an equitable machinery for mediation, and reared a structure of order



MEYER LONDON, COUNSEL FOR THE UNIONS
THROUGHOUT THE PROTOCOL NEGOTIA-
TIONS IN THE GARMENT TRADES



HUGH FRAYNE, OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION
OF LABOR, WHO HELPED TO BRING ABOUT
THE PROTOCOL AGREEMENT

and health where disorder and insanitary conditions held sway. It has established industrial peace with honor, and it has a social and economic significance that invests the whole development with interest for everybody.

Perhaps in no other activity, save only agriculture, is the human contact so wide or so intimate as in the making of garments. The vast majority of Americans wear ready-made clothes, and their manufacture has become an enormous industry.

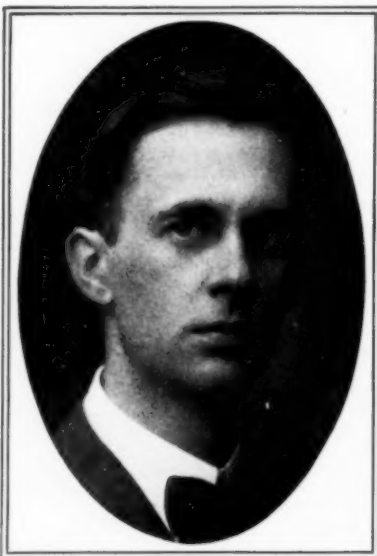
New York is the center of this colossal needle trade. With a yearly output that totals more than half a billion dollars, it is easily the dominant manufacture of the metropolis. Of its five important branches, ranging from cheap caps to costly gowns, the creation of women's apparel, inner and outer, leads all the rest with its three thousand shops, its hundred thousand workers, and its annual production of three hundred million dollars' worth of goods.

In this throbbing wing of the industry, alert with the whir of myriad motors, and with fickle fashion perched amid the sweat-shop squalor, the battle of labor has been the longest and the fiercest. Yet here the travail of bitter and costly strike bred the peace which now seems so well assured.

THE PEOPLE AND THE INDUSTRY

But before we invade this domain let us first glance at the people who dwell within it. Nowhere is a vast trade carried on with such a variegated human background.

One reason is the fact that the garment industry is the great immigrant industry. Every year not less than ten thousand men and women—most of them from the crowded Russian Ghettos, others from the sunlit Italian slopes, and all seeking fortune in the Promised Land—pause at its very gateway and become absorbed in the process of clothes-making. They naturally gravitate



WALTER H. BARTHOLOMEW, GENERAL MANAGER OF THE DRESS AND WAIST MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIATION

From a photograph by White, New York

toward it, first, because their countrymen control it, and secondly, because little skill is required in some of the preliminary stages. Now you see why New York is the heart of the industry, and why it was destined for unrest and disorder.

Year after year, with the increasing demand for cheap, ready-made garments, the industry grew by leaps and bounds. But there has never been anything majestic or inspiring about this business. With steel, for example, there is the mighty force of press and hammer, the glare of glowing furnace, all the romance and action of an epic

industry. Here nearly everything was sordid with the stern struggle to live; there was the shadow of tenement tragedy and always the echo of the "Song of the Shirt."

Beneath the grime of this immigrant mill a sinister system developed. It can be best—or worst—illustrated in the cloak, skirt, and suit trade, the largest and most powerful branch of the women's wear industry.

Up to ten years ago this trade—and it was typical of other garment trades—was largely operated by small manufacturers. Most of them had been immigrants and had worked at bench and machine. With a little capital they were able to start shops of their own. They converted sections of East Side tenements into so-called "factories," and thus the sweat-shop with all its unsanitary horrors came into being. They did business on the barest margin; they took on the newly arrived "green-horns," taught them the rudiments of the work, and paid them almost starvation wages. A sort of "padrone" system developed.

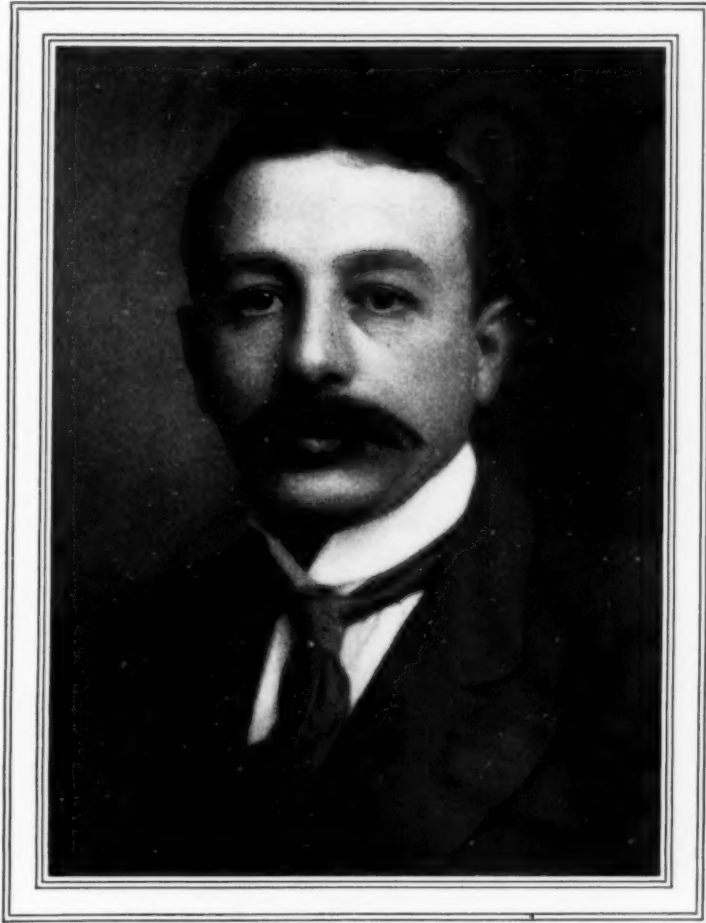
Of course, there were some big manufacturers, but they did not have large establishments of their own. They parceled out their work to smaller bosses, and in this way the sub-contracting process, which

fostered all the evils of the trade, came into being.

For example, a large manufacturer got an order for five thousand army overcoats. He bought the goods and had the garments cut on his premises. Then he made a contract with a smaller man to make the coats

with his help—mostly "kikes," as the raw Russian immigrants were called. It mattered not if they worked long hours in dark, unhealthful places.

This sub-contracting system relieved the big manufacturer from contact with his employees or even with the processes of



JULIUS HENRY COHEN, THE NEW YORK LAWYER WHO DEVELOPED THE
PROTOCOL IDEA INTO A WORKING INSTRUMENT

From a photograph by Puck, New York

at a certain price. He gave himself no further concern about the matter until the finished articles were delivered.

The smaller boss had a sweat-shop on some crowded East Side street or up a dark alley. His task was to produce the garments cheaply, and at a profit to himself. Therefore he drove the hardest bargain

work. At the same time it built up an army of fiercely competing sub-contractors whose very competition made matters all the worse for the workers. The striking cutter of to-day was the little "boss" of to-morrow; "by next week a piece of ill luck with a contract would plunge him back to the ranks again. Small strikes developed in

the little shops; there were even strikes within strikes. Everything was change and disorder.

The contract system developed another evil, a by-product of the seasonal character

were pacific, tolerant, even indulgent. At these times the unions were recruited to their fullest standards. They had the boss at their mercy, because he had to get out his goods. But when the slack seasons came, the boss had the upper hand. He discharged people right and left; the unions' ranks were depleted; unrest and hunger stalked about.

This seasonal character caused another distressing condition. Realizing that his shop would be idle for part of the year, the average employer paid little attention to its sanitary equipment. Since most of the workers lived amid poverty and congestion, they came to regard these unhealthful conditions as part of the portion of their labor.

Sooner or later, a change was inevitable. As the quality of the ready-made garment improved, the larger manufacturers, who in most cases had risen from "kike" to magnate, began to develop the direct employment idea. They moved from the congested downtown districts into the "loft" building zone up-town, where they were near their big customers in the department-stores. By this change they not only inaugurated a revolution in their industry, but changed the physical character of whole neighborhoods.

THE ATTITUDE OF THE UNIONS

During these years of toil and change the unions were not idle. For more than a quarter of a century there had been organizations among the garment-workers, whose ranks rose and fell with the fortunes of trade. During the rush times they got, in the main, what they wanted, but when idleness smote them, and eviction heightened the pinch of adversity, they were glad to accept any terms.

Agreements were entered into only to be broken. At best they were but truces to enable the workers to recoup depleted treasuries and fill out their wasted bodies.

When conditions became intolerable, they had recourse to their only weapon, which was the strike; but they were poor,



LOUIS D. BRANDEIS, WHO SUGGESTED THE IDEA OF THE PROTOCOL, AND WHO IS CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD OF ARBITRATION

From a copyrighted photograph by Harris & Ewing, Washington

of the industry. In garment-making, and especially with women's wear, there are two busy seasons—spring and autumn—while during the rest of the year trade is dull.

During the busy periods, when the shops were crowded to the utmost, the bosses

while most of the employers had means, and they almost invariably lost their battles.

The quarrel was usually over wages and union recognition. No industry presented such discrepancies of skill and labor. You found a greenhorn with a few days' training competing with a seasoned worker. Most of the work was by piece, for the garments are made in sections, and sometimes fifteen different people work on a cloak or a skirt. Hence there was no standardization of pay.

Among the manufacturers there was the same lack of order. Mystery and secrecy invested their opera-



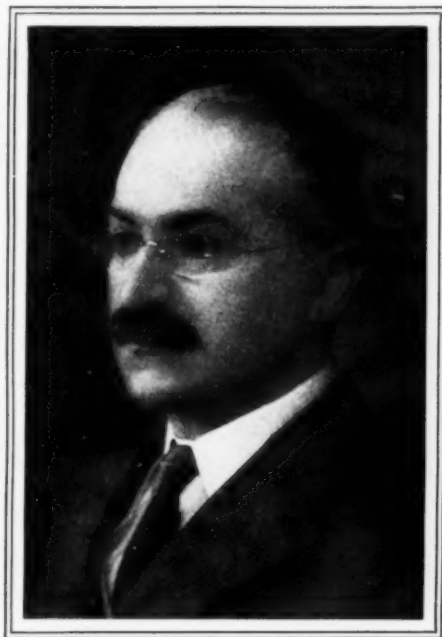
JOHN A. DVCHE, SECRETARY OF THE LADIES' GARMENT WORKERS' UNION

tions, and competition was bitter. The reputable boss who wanted to have a cleanly establishment was forced to compete with the sweat-shop padrone who, by reason of his comparatively small "overhead" cost, could undersell him.

What was happening in the cloak, skirt, and suit branch was practically being duplicated throughout the whole women's-wear industry. Everywhere was discontent, punctuated by periodic strikes. The general public never heard of these conditions, save when there was a particularly violent strike involving girl pickets, or when some well-meaning but misguided al-



M. SILBERMAN, CHAIRMAN OF THE CLOAK, SUIT, AND SKIRT MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIATION



SAMUEL FLOERSHEIMER, PRESIDENT OF THE DRESS AND WAIST MANUFACTURERS' ASSOCIATION

truist, usually recruited from the smart set, projected herself into the troubled arena.

THE COMING OF THE PROTOCOL

But amid all this anarchy events were shaping toward peace and order.

During the hot summer of 1910, the long-simmering grievances of the cloak, skirt, and suit-workers were hotter than the weather. They had built their unions up to a fighting strength of twenty-five thousand, and in July they declared a strike. Their campaign was mainly directed against the Manufacturers' Protective Association, for the better class of bosses had meanwhile alined themselves into a unit for defense. Thus organization was pitted against organization, and because of this very condition it was possible to achieve the long-sought peace which was now at hand.

The strike presented the familiar line-up. The workers demanded higher wages, no discrimination against the unions, the elimination of the sub-contracting system, better sanitary conditions, freedom on their various religious holidays, and a general wiping out of the atmosphere which made the industry unwholesome and a menace to both worker and consumer. The usual conflict raged with violent disorder. Neither side would budge.

In Boston there was a public-spirited lawyer—Louis D. Brandeis—a smooth-shaven man who looked like the pictures of the youthful Lincoln. Through his efforts savings-bank insurance had been introduced in Massachusetts, Boston had secured cheaper gas, and many a labor tangle had been straightened out. He became interested in the New York situation, mainly because of the sufferings of the workers,

and he was instrumental in arranging a conference between representatives of the warring sides over which he presided. The counsel for the manufacturers was Julius Henry Cohen, and the unions' legal spokesman was Meyer London.

At first all was smooth sailing. The em-

ployers were willing to yield on wages, hours, and working conditions; but suddenly the conference foundered on the rock of the union shop. The workers demanded the closed shop. The employers were willing to employ a majority of unionists, and sympathized with their efforts to improve conditions, but they flatly refused to be bound by iron-clad restrictions as to their choice of help. Negotiations ended, and the strike was resumed with renewed vigor and regrettable violence.

As in most strikes, it became a case of the survival of the strongest. Hunger began to pinch the legion of workers,

and the situation became so desperate that once more Mr. Brandeis brought the factions together. This time he projected an idea which was destined to make his name live in the annals of conciliation.

You will recall that the closed union shop was the rock on which the first conference split. Now Mr. Brandeis said:

"Why not compromise and have a preferential union shop, in which the employer gives the preference to union men, providing they are as skilful as the non-union, and maintains the union standards?"

Here was a common ground on which both sides could meet without sacrifice of cherished contentions. On this suggestion, first made by Mr. Brandeis, and developed into a working instrument by Mr. Cohen, was developed the Peace Protocol. When signed by employer and union, and backed



WALTER WEYL, A MEMBER OF THE BOARD OF ARBITRATION, THE SUPREME COURT OF THE GARMENT TRADES

From a photograph by Sarony, New York



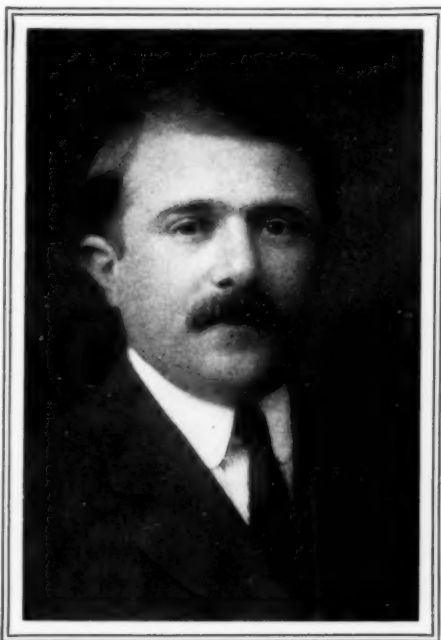
DR. WILLIAM JAY SCHIEFFELIN, CHAIRMAN OF THE
JOINT BOARD OF SANITARY CONTROL

Drawn by S. G. Cahlan from a photograph



DR. GEORGE M. PRICE, DIRECTOR OF THE JOINT
BOARD OF SANITARY CONTROL

From a photograph by Marceau, New York



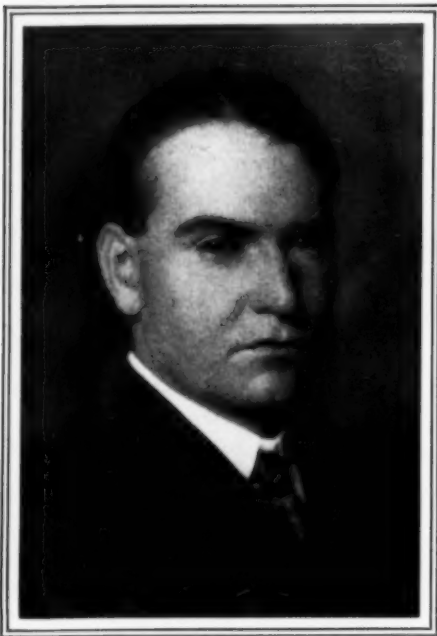
DR. HENRY MOSKOWITZ, SECRETARY OF THE JOINT
BOARD OF SANITARY CONTROL

From a photograph by Pach, New York



DR. PAUL ABELSON, MANAGER OF THE CLOAK, SUIT,
AND SKIRT MANUFACTURERS' LABOR DEPARTMENT

From a photograph by Pach, New York



HAMILTON HOLT, A MEMBER OF THE BOARD
OF ARBITRATION

From a photograph by Hollinger, New York

up by the indorsement and guarantee of the American Federation of Labor, this became an agency for harmony without precedent or parallel in the whole trouble-studded history of union labor in the United States.

What, then, is the Protocol? Summed up, its principal features are these—a voluntary agreement of unlimited duration for collective bargaining; a minimum wage scale; a working week of fifty hours; a board of grievances, composed of representatives of both sides, to which all disputes are referred; a board of arbitration, comprising three disinterested public men, which constitutes the final court of appeals in all differences; a joint board of sanitary control, chosen from the unions, the employers, and the public for the regulation of sanitary conditions in the shops; and the preferential union shop.

Here was created a code of industrial common law, whose basic statutes may be stated thus:

First, concede to the workers that which benefits them and does not injure the employer.

Second, concede to the employer that

which benefits him and does not injure the employee.

Third, conciliate conflicting claims by the rule of reason.

The conspicuous feature of the Protocol which most concerns the general public is the provision that pending the settlement of a dispute, no matter how serious, there shall be no lockout or strike. Thus much of the old agony and hardship of industrial difference is eliminated.

THE PREFERENTIAL UNION SHOP

Now let us take up in brief detail some of the most important phases of the Protocol and see how they work out in actual practise.

None, perhaps, is quite so significant as the preferential union shop, which has given the whole industry a rebirth of efficiency and order. Since this idea must inevitably prevail in many activities, because it is the logical solvent of a far-reaching problem, it is worth while quoting the section of the Protocol which sets forth its conditions:

Each member of the manufacturers' association is to maintain a union shop, a union shop being understood to refer to a shop



MISS LILLIAN D. WALD, A MEMBER OF THE JOINT
BOARD OF SANITARY CONTROL

Drawn by S. G. Cahan from a photograph

where union standards as to working conditions, hours of labor, and rates of wages as herein stipulated prevail, and where, when hiring help, union men are preferred; it being recognized that, since there are differences of degree in skill among those employed in the trade, employers shall have freedom of selection as between one union man and another, and shall not be confined to any list, nor bound to follow any prescribed order whatever.

The question of wages is left to a price committee composed of shop workers. If this committee cannot reach an amicable arrangement with the employer, it goes to the board of grievances.

The Protocol puts the walking delegates out of business. By its provisions these too familiar agents of unrest become "clerks" or adjusters of differences.

The successful operation of the preferential union shop reveals a situation unique in labor. The employer becomes an unconscious agent of the union. The union, on the other hand, finds it advantageous to encourage a close-knit federation of bosses. The mutual advantages are many.

The employer is protected from unfair competition, because all parties to the Protocol must maintain the same working conditions and therefore meet on a common business ground. He is likewise immune from those arbitrary acts of the unions which hitherto tied up his shop almost without notice and caused great loss.

The union finds its prestige and power encouraged and recognized. Since the employer is pledged to the preference of union men, the union sees to it that the supply of its workers is never exhausted. Sometimes it happens that no union man or woman is available, and the boss hires a non-union employee. What happens? If this non-union man wants the Protocol shop privileges—chief of which is that he shall not be laid off unless absolutely necessary, and always *after* the non-unionists are dropped—he naturally wishes to join the union. Under the Protocol, the union must accept him if he applies in good faith. It is the spirit of the Protocol that the privilege of joining the union shall be denied no man or woman, and at the same time that none shall be debarred from the fundamental right to work.

The unions have met the situation with good sense and fairness. For one thing, they have reduced their initiations and

dues, so that the humblest worker may enjoy their benefits. They discipline their members, too, when the case demands it.

A manufacturer of children's cloaks who was a party to the Protocol made a private agreement with his employees for a special wage during extra time, thus securing an unfair advantage over his competitors. Then he discharged one of the men, and the rest refused to work. Here was a case where both sides had violated their agreement. When the workers went to their union, they were met with this statement:

"You made a private agreement, and you went out on strike. You are suspended."

The employers' association, following its rule, dismissed their erring brother. The result was that the employer was glad to apologize and promise not to repeat his offense, while the workers, chastened by their experience, went back to work with a new regard for the integrity of written compact.

A glance at the record of the board of grievances in the cloak industry shows how well the Protocol works out. Three-fourths of the disputes have been settled by the clerks—that is, without recourse to the board, which sits as a court and hears witnesses and evidence from both sides. It is an eloquent commentary on the justice of this system to say that out of several thousand complaints not one has yet been appealed to the board of arbitration. This last, the supreme court of the industry, is composed of Mr. Brandeis, Hamilton Holt, editor of the *Independent*, and Walter Weyl, a writer on economics—Mr. Weyl having succeeded Morris Hillquit, who resigned owing to ill health.

THE BOARD OF SANITARY CONTROL

When you turn to the joint board of sanitary control, you encounter the most original and striking feature of the Protocol, and the one fraught with the greatest possibilities of good for the whole industry. It safeguards the health of the employee, increases his efficiency, and makes him a happier social agency. At the same time it makes the product cleaner and more wholesome, and thus the consumer is protected.

By the terms of the Protocol the board is composed of seven members, two from the unions, two from the employers, and three from the public. The latter representation includes representatives of New

York's highest and most useful citizenship. They are Dr. William Jay Schieffelin, a leader in many public movements, Dr. Henry Moskowitz, another eminent social worker, and Miss Lillian D. Wald, who is head of the most famous nurses' settlement in the greater city. The director of the work is Dr. George M. Price, a trained sanitarian, a veteran in factory inspection, and a hygienist of proved ability.

The task of the board has been to "clean up the industry." By a system of drastic inspection that has been unflinching and unafraid, some amazing results have been achieved. On the first inspection two-thirds of the eighteen hundred shops in the industry were found to be more or less defective. Factories were found in cellars and garrets, amid almost unspeakable sanitary conditions. Disease and dirt dominated most of the smaller establishments. To-day seventy per cent of the workers are in certificated shops—that is, those having certificates of health, cleanliness, and proper sanitation. The sweat-shop padrone has been driven from his darkness, and the great majority of shops are in clean, high, healthy loft buildings.

At the headquarters of the board is a card catalogue of every shop in the industry. You can find out the window area, the square feet of working space, the wash-room facilities, and even the number of steps that the workers have to walk up and down. This sanitary map is rigidly kept up to date by periodical inspections. In shops where there is any backsliding, the inspectors come each week; in the larger and certificated establishments the inspection is twice a year.

This censorship has developed labor's newest and most picturesque weapon of defense—the sanitary strike. Under the Protocol, the employees can walk out if the shop conditions are not decent or healthy. This is the only kind of strike that is authorized.

I could tell of various sanitary strikes. Down in Ridge Street, for example, a skirt shop was located over a rag warehouse. The smell, dust, and general hideousness of the atmosphere caused the workers to go out. The board of sanitary control ordered the boss to move. At first he demurred. The board and the union backed up the employees in their refusal to work, and the employer soon found a cleaner, better factory.

This beneficent sanitary supervision is not the only protection that has been set up. The morals of the girl workers are also safeguarded. For instance, after the last shirt-waist strike was settled, several girls refused to go back to a certain shop. When the boss asked their reason, they declared that they could not work under his foreman. The chief clerks of the grievance board took up the case and had a hearing, at which the girls testified that the foreman had grossly insulted them. The clerks ordered his discharge.

"But I have had that man for ten years," declared the employer, "and he is my right hand."

"It makes no difference," said the clerks. "He must go"; and he went.

The sanitary control is only the beginning of a larger humanitarian work. With the work of cleaning up the shops well under way, Dr. Price is introducing fire drills, lessons in right living, courses in industrial education, and a system of insurance for tuberculous workers.

In the cloak, skirt, and suit industry, at the end of two and a half years of the Protocol, you behold the unions recruited to a membership of fifty-three thousand, practically the working strength of this branch of the trade; the employers perfectly organized; and peace, content, and mutual respect everywhere. Neither side would return to the old conditions.

THE MARCH OF THE PROTOCOL

This experience with the Protocol alone would have justified its existence, but its march has been militant and steady. Closely allied with the cloak, skirt, and suit industry is the making of dresses and shirt-waists, a comparatively new trade which has expanded enormously within the past decade, until it musters seven hundred shops with thirty-six thousand workers and a yearly output valued at fifty million dollars.

Sanitary conditions were not as bad here as in the older trades, because most of the shops were in new loft buildings; but there was the old bickering about wages and union recognition. In 1910 the employers won a costly victory after a bitter strike. The workers went back sullen and determined to revolt again. Last June the International Union, in convention at Toronto, authorized another strike.

Now the remarkable part of this action

was that the parent body urged its New York workers to demand the Protocol. The big dress and waist manufacturers took counsel with their brethren of the cloak trade.

"How is the Protocol working out?" they asked.

"Admirably," was the reply. "We would not change under any circumstances."

Then came a situation unique in labor history. The better class of dress and waist manufacturers were willing to accept the Protocol, but they could not do business with an irresponsible union composed mostly of young girls. At this point the American Federation of Labor, through its president, Samuel Gompers, and its New York representative, Hugh Frayne, reorganized the workers and guaranteed the performance of any agreement they might make. To them the employers said:

"Recruit your unions, and we will organize. Then we can unite for the same kind of Protocol which exists in the cloak trade. Do your part, and we will do ours."

They even closed their shops for a few days to enable the workers to organize. Most of the workers flew to the union standards, and the employers formed an association; but some of the bosses held out. In order to club them into line, and with the approval of the organized employers, who were willing and ready for peace, a strike was declared. It was aimed solely at the men who refused to see the Protocol light. After a month they gave in, and the dress and waist trade was protocolized.

The cloak Protocol, together with a board of arbitration and a board of sanitary control, was adopted. But the dress and waist people went their cloak contemporaries one better, for they set about standardizing wages.

In the cloak trade there is still more or less amiable bickering about prices. The question of wages is fixed by the price committees in the various shops. In the making of dresses and waists there is much more fluctuation in style and price, and it has always been difficult to fix a standard wage.

"Discussion is always dangerous," said Walter Bartholomew, general manager of the Dress and Waist Manufacturers' Association. "Let us fix some sort of tentative price."

An experienced average worker was as-

signed to make a garment, and was timed by hours' work. This time, multiplied by a rate of thirty cents an hour, was fixed as the standard wage for that particular class of waist.

All bosses who paid less than thirty cents an hour were at once compelled to establish this minimum wage. In shops where expensive garments are made and where the labor is more skilled and better paid the higher rate per hour continues. The whole effect of this standardization has been to wipe out the starvation price.

In arriving at this standard, most of the employers showed a woful ignorance of the very fundamentals of the business. In the main, they knew only the routine and price of their own establishments; yet they were engaged in reorganizing a whole industry. Again Mr. Bartholomew came forward with an admirable suggestion.

"Let us do the thing right," he said, "and put an end to temporizing. Let us get an expert to investigate the industry and fix a scientific scale of wages based on the cost of manufacture. Then neither side can offer reasonable objection."

Out of this idea has developed the wage scale board, with N. I. Stone as chief statistician. He had a similar post with the Tariff Board in Washington. Under his direction a trained force is making a searching investigation of the industry. Wages and costs over a long period of years are being summarized and compared. It is a new angle in efficiency engineering and scientific business organization.

From the dress and waist trade the Protocol has now spread to the making of kimonos, wrappers, white goods, and children's dresses. Since the beginning of the year, in New York alone, nearly forty thousand union workers have been added to the army of industrial peace and sanity. In Boston, the Protocol has been adopted in both the cloak and the dress and waist industries, while in Chicago the leading manufacturer of ready-made men's clothing has signed it for the benefit of his ten thousand employees.

The Protocol means moral discipline for the employer and the employee, and an awakened public responsibility for labor and its product. In short, it is creating a whole new economic order, and is helping perhaps more than any other agency to realize the long-cherished dream of an industrial democracy.

WITH ACCRUED INTEREST

BY FRANK M. O'BRIEN

AUTHOR OF "THE SPELL OF THE SEA," "FROM HIS HAND," ETC.

THE clock of Trinity was pointing close to three when Mr. Edward Sullivan steered his six-cylinder Blotz into Wall Street and brought it to a stop in front of the offices of the Olympic Trust Company.

Mr. Sullivan had just come from his own office, farther north. His brow, ordinarily the serene top of a serene and healthy face, carried a frown. It was the second business day in two years that he had not found a good man to sell a bond to, or a good bond to buy from a man.

Mr. Sullivan could not, perhaps, be called the bond king of New York, but well might he claim such titles as Count of Convertibles, Duke of Debentures, or Prince of Prior Liens. And the bonds he dealt in were bonds, not bunks. He cared not for the conversation of bond-sellers which ended:

"And when Congress makes the appropriation for the irrigation of this vast and little understood garden-spot of the great West—"

Ended is the word, for that was the end of it for Mr. Sullivan. Sweeny could have the peroration.

The street knew that Sullivan dealt in stuff that could stand the hydrochloric test. It was said of him that he never bought a bond that could not stroll through the late Mr. Morgan's office without being barked at.

Sullivan's success was all luck, every one said, including Sullivan himself. If Mr. Harold Van Stuyne, wishing to realize enough ready coin for a new yacht, laid before Mr. Sullivan his hoard of International Umbrella Fours and of Consolidated Sunshade Threes, and Mr. Sullivan chose to buy the threes—well, it just wouldn't happen to rain as long as Sullivan held the Sunshade bonds. If he walked home from his office, he would meet at Union Square a despondent Republican

who wished to unload New York City Fours, and at Forty-Second Street some glowing Democrat eager to buy the same commodity.

In the course of such happy adventures Sullivan had gathered to himself about one million dollars in real money. Yet it was a matter of some surprise to him when, a fortnight before, the men who controlled the Olympic Trust Company intimated to him that they would be pleased to see him ally himself with the Olympic.

It was a strong company, with some able-minded citizens on its directorate. So Sullivan threw his account and the accounts of his satellites to the Olympic, and was made, not only a director, but a vice-president. He was a bit puzzled by the second and higher honor, but Mr. Wetternheim, the president of the company and chairman of the board, explained to him the directors' wish "to infuse the better and younger blood of finance into the veins of the grand old institution."

Sullivan liked it. It was better to be referred to as "Sullivan, of the Olympic Trust," than as "Sullivan, the bond magician." At least, it was more solemn, and solemnity has much to do with great finance. Would you put such childlike faith in your savings-bank if Eddie Foy, in costume, sat in the president's chair? No, no! For yours, old John Chilblain, the broadclothed baron of a thousand double-cinched mortgages, wearing the badges of bank-presidency southeast of each ear!

But we shall return to Mr. Sullivan's own physical self, which has abandoned the motor-car to the care of his low-browed chauffeur and has been propelled in the ordinary human way, step by step, through the portals of the trust company's offices.

"Has the directors' meeting begun?" asked Sullivan of the special officer on

guard. It was his first meeting, and he feared he might be late.

"Meeting's at three thirty, sir," replied Flynn. "Mr. Sullivan, isn't it, sir?"

The bond prince confessed his identity.

"There's an old gentleman been waiting for you half an hour," said Flynn. "He says he went to your office and was told he'd be likely to find you here. I gave him a seat in one of the private rooms—that one." Flynn indicated it with a thumb rampant regardant. Then he added, not in the tone of a bank policeman to a bank director, but in the tone of a Flynn to a Sullivan: "He's a fine-looking old tad, though he seems a bit queer."

Sullivan stepped into the private room and found that Flynn's description of his caller was a good one. Mr. Martin Aloysius Kerrigan, erect in spite of his seventy odd years, looked fit to step into any St. Patrick's Day parade and add to its beauty. His "high one" was polished to a mirror, the frock coat cut for him by McGuire fifteen years before held all its graceful lines, and his gray trousers bagged only slightly where they impinged upon congress boots—boots as square of toe as Kerrigan was of soul. His ruddy face, flanked with white earlocks, beamed on Sullivan.

Mr. Kerrigan nursed on his lap a paper parcel half as big as a shoe-box.

"So you're Eddie Sullivan!" was his greeting to the bond expert. "I haven't seen you since you were a lad, but I'd know you by your father, though you're not as black-muzzled as he was."

Sullivan's remembrance of old Mr. Kerrigan's personality was hazy, but he had often heard his father talk of "Marty," who had been his comrade in the Civil War and in General O'Neill's celebrated little trip to Canada. Later the two men had toiled together in the Pennsylvania oil-fields. In his own declining years the elder Sullivan had often expressed regret that he could not find Kerrigan.

"I'd like to square up with Marty," John Sullivan once said to his son. "He did me more than one good turn."

So it was only filial duty for Edward Sullivan to be polite to old Martin A. Kerrigan. He entered into conversation in the old First Ward spirit, and the two exchanged all the complimentary queries and replies common to real scions of their race.

Kerrigan, it appeared, had come to hear of young Mr. Sullivan's identity, prosperity,

and whereabouts through a mutual acquaintance, Mr. Geegan, the affluent janitor of the Forty-Story Building and past grand president of the Shamrock League.

"It isn't often I see Geegan," said Mr. Kerrigan, adopting a confidential tone that was almost mysterious.

Mr. Sullivan politely raised his eyebrows.

"You see," continued old Mr. Kerrigan, "I'm livin' down on Staten Island with me married daughter, Ellen. She and Joe—that's her husband—are very good to me, but they don't like me to go away from the house. I guess they think I'm too old to be about on me own business; but I slipped away to-day to find you, sir."

"I'm glad you found me," said Sullivan. "And now that you have, what can I do for you?"

"Well, you see," began Mr. Kerrigan, "the young folks, Ellen and Joe, are not well off, though they're hard-working young people, and I want to do something for them. Joe has a fine little truck-garden business, and he could do finer if he had the capital to build a greenhouse and buy a horse and cart. So I thought, sir, I'd try to sell my bonds. They don't know I've got them, and I want to surprise them."

"I'll be glad to sell the bonds for you, Mr. Kerrigan," said Sullivan.

He was glad that his father's friend had come to him, for, in spite of Kerrigan's apparent health, he saw that the old man's mind was not in the pink of condition. In fact, he was not surprised to learn that Joe and Ellen had kept him closely at home. If Kerrigan had valuable bonds it would be a pity to let him fall into the hands of crooks.

"Bring the bonds to me as soon as you can," continued Sullivan; "or let me come to your home and get them. I'll get you the best price in the market for them."

"Oh, I've brought them with me," said Kerrigan briskly. "Here they are!"

He laid his bundle on the table before the bond man and opened it. The papers it contained were all alike—all of the same issue, as Sullivan saw at a glance. Picking up one of them, he walked to the window to examine it.

A long, low, whispering whistle came from Sullivan's lips. He looked across the little room at Kerrigan, who was watching him expectantly.

"Maybe you know something about those bonds," said the old man slowly.

"Your father had a bunch of them himself. He and I bought at the same time."

"I remember them well," said Sullivan. "If you wish to dispose of the bonds, Mr. Kerrigan, I shall be very glad to take them off your hands. I will agree to give you their par value, but I cannot promise more than that."

"And what's their par value?" inquired Kerrigan.

"Ten thousand dollars," said Sullivan.

"That's what I paid for them," said Kerrigan. "I was worth half a million then, with our dozen oil-gushers, and I bought everything that was for sale. I didn't hold my money much better than Coal-Oil Johnny did. I'm lucky to have saved these, anyway."

"Come out to the teller's window," said Sullivan, "and I'll fix you up."

He introduced the old man to Mr. Hyman, the receiving teller, with instructions which insured the issue of a certificate of deposit to Martin Aloysius Kerrigan for ten thousand dollars; likewise a check-book. Sullivan took care to see that no cash was placed in the trembling old hand.

"I'm going to send you home in my car, Mr. Kerrigan," said Sullivan. "To-night you can write a nice, fat check for Joe and Ellen, and have something to spare."

"I hope you make a profit out of the bonds," said the grateful Kerrigan. "I'm grateful to you for what you've done."

"Don't worry about the bonds," answered Sullivan, as he carefully tied up the package. "I'm sure I made no mistake in buying them."

He escorted Kerrigan to the street, tucked him into the automobile, gave instructions to the chauffeur about not burning up the Staten Island Speedway, said good-by to his father's friend, and went back into the bank with the package of bonds tucked under his arm.

II

"THE directors' meeting is just beginning, sir," said Flynn.

Sullivan did not hurry into the directors' room, for he observed that his friend Mr. Wetternheim, the chairman, was still in the outer office, very busily whispering with Mr. Hyman, the teller who had opened the account for Mr. Kerrigan. Sullivan waited until this conference was over, and then, joining Wetternheim, walked with him toward the sanctum of the directors.

"There are several of the directors whom I haven't met," he explained to the chairman. "I want you to present me."

"Quite right, Mr. Sullivan," said Mr. Wetternheim. "You will find them all business men of the finest type; men of advanced ideas in finance, and most careful bankers."

So Sullivan, entering the room with the long mahogany table and the dozen chaste chairs to match, was introduced to his colleagues, Messrs. Joseph Gloutzman, Herman Ebstern, Duncan McLeod, Jacob Gottlieb, Maurice Ellenbogen, Hiram J. Perkins, David Llewelyn Jones, Casper Van Strunk, Cecil Guy Sterling, and Moses Gansmere.

"It looks to me," said Sullivan to himself, when he had finished the formality of being introduced, "as if this board did need an infusion of Irish blood. But why, I wonder, did they pick *me* out?"

He did not ask himself the question seriously, but it was answered seriously in about three minutes.

The secretary of the board, Mr. McLeod, was reading the minutes of the previous meeting—a meeting which Sullivan had not attended because he understood from Wetternheim that it was to be only a formal affair. Mr. McLeod droned through a mess of unimportant things, while the directors, including the new one, looked bored, puffed cigars, and fidgeted with watch-chains.

"The following resolution was duly moved and seconded," read Mr. McLeod.

Sullivan felt an uneasy stirring among his fellow directors. Each made an effort to appear unconcerned, but the effort, being visible, was an utter failure. Mr. Wetternheim coughed. Mr. Gottlieb's chair creaked. Mr. Van Strunk dropped his glasses.

"Whereas," continued the secretary, "the board of directors realize that, in the mind of the business public at least, the personal fortunes of the directors of a financial institution are inseparably linked with the institution itself; and whereas the board of directors consider it necessary, in these times of unfounded suspicion, that the business affairs of each director be known to the board itself; therefore be it resolved that each member of this board of directors be bound upon honor to report at the close of business each day to the chairman of the board all purchases of

stocks, bonds, or real estate made by him that day, and the price paid therefor, together with the name of the seller. The resolution," concluded the secretary, "was put to a vote and adopted."

Mr. Sullivan knew *now* why he had been invited to ornament the directorate.

"May I ask," he said, "whether the vote on that resolution was unanimous?"

"Resolution offered by Mr. Wetternheim, seconded by Mr. Gansmere, unanimously adopted," replied the secretary.

"That was two days ago, at Monday's meeting?" asked Sullivan.

The secretary assented.

A high-pitched voice from the far end of the table broke a silence that was becoming wicked. It was the voice of Mr. Cecil Guy Sterling, who was a director because of his connection with his uncle's bank in London. At his New York clubs the boys called him "Pounds," and voted him a bonehead. To be dubbed a bonehead in a fashionable New York club, one has to have an ivory tip of surpassing solidity.

"I couldn't see, y'know," said Mr. Sterling, "just the sense of that blooming resolution, because none of us, y'know, is such a very active trader in stocks and bonds and such things. I fahncy, perhaps, the thing is more important to Mr. Sullivan, as I understand he's quite a fellow in the bond market."

"The resolution," began Mr. Wetternheim, frowning on Cecil Guy, "was adopted in response to a growing demand among those who believe in—"

But Sullivan was on his feet, roaring, and not to be denied.

"The resolution," he cried, "is a confirmation of a rumor I heard weeks ago, but which I discredited until now—the rumor that our honorable chairman and three or four more of you are going into the bond business, and going into it strong. You've given me the high-browed honor of sitting on this directorate and being third vice-president of the trust company—all hollow mockery—and in return you try to force me to tell you, at the end of each day's work, just what I've done. At the end of six months I'd be holding out a tin cup to passers-by and wearing a placard inscribed: 'Have pity on a poor man who was fatally injured by the recoil of a gentlemen's agreement.' Wouldn't I be grand, telling you where I pick 'em up cheap and

sell 'em at a profit? I hate to be rude with such a dignified crowd, but I herewith tie tin cans to the respective tails of my directorship and my vice-presidency and set them adrift. The only time I'd ever like to sit here again is the day when the fathers of that resolution make a report, on the level, of their buying and selling; but that day will never come, for that surely was a gentleman's agreement, and *I was to be the gentleman!*"

"Really now—" began Cecil Guy.

"I absolve you, Mr. Sterling," said Sullivan. "I don't believe you were in with the play at all, and that goes for every other man who didn't see why the trap was baited. And now I'll take my clothes—if I'm lucky—and go!"

Chairman Wetternheim got up, too. He was purple with rage.

"Your insinuations are outrageous!" he said to Sullivan. "Do you mean to impeach this resolution?"

"I wouldn't harm a hair of its head," said the bond prince. "Keep it, coddle it, and get another goat's milk for it if you can. It's a grand little resolution."

Now be it known that Director Joseph Gloutzman, who had remained silent until this time, was all shrewdness, even from childhood. When, as an itinerant merchant in his youth, he found his stock embarrassed with single shoe-strings of odd sizes and consequently not to be mated, he established a route among the peg-legged men of the East Side. To summarize him, he never overlooked a bet. Now he spoke.

"If the resolution is all right, Mr. Sullivan," he said sharply, "then we must have a report of your purchases during the past forty-eight hours."

Sullivan grinned savagely.

"If I had made any, I don't think I'd tell you," he said; "but it just happens that I haven't bought a bond in—"

He stopped. Wetternheim was pointing at the paper parcel in front of Sullivan.

"You bought that to-day, Mr. Sullivan," the chairman cried.

The bond prince was staggered, but he came back quickly.

"So," he said, with a finger close to Wetternheim's nose, "your teller, Mr. Hyman, is your spy as well as your nephew! I had forgotten these bonds. I did buy them to-day. Furthermore, they belong to me, and no gentlemen's agreement is going to force me to make a report on them."

"But it is a resolution and binding," cried Mr. Gloutzman. "We should know what the bonds are already."

"Right!" cried Mr. Gottlieb.

"Right!" echoed Messrs. Ebstern, Ellenbogen, Perkins, and the rest—all but Cecil Guy, who was busy dolling his mustache.

"More than right!" cried chairman Wetternheim. "We must see the bonds—that is, I mean, we must have the report as our resolution provides. Then, Mr. Sullivan, we will try to bear up under the blow of your absence."

Wetternheim was hot. He didn't care about the bonds, barring a slight natural curiosity; but his personal dignity had suffered, and he was browbeating Sullivan to get consolation. Sullivan failed to be squelched, however.

"Your spying teller," he replied, "undoubtedly told you that I paid ten thousand dollars for these bonds, and he could have told you that I bought them from Martin A. Kerrigan. I'll tell you that I paid par for them. I'll tell you further, that they're for sale, if you want to buy."

"I'll give you par for them, Mr. Sullivan," said Mr. Gloutzman, suddenly changing from insulted director to busy financier.

All he cared to know about the bonds was that Sullivan had bought them, for Sullivan's profitable dealing was a byword in the street.

"When I buy at par I don't sell at par, Mr. Gloutzman," was Sullivan's answer.

He put the bundle under his arm and took his hat.

"What is the price, Mr. Sullivan?" piped up Van Strunk.

Sullivan paused at the door. He scowled at the crew he was leaving.

"If there was one among you," he said rudely, "who had the nerve to buy these bonds 'on sight unseen,' I'd have half a mind to let them go at par, plus accrued interest. But it takes nerve to be a good bond man, and I don't believe any of you have got it. You had an awful gall, though, to put over that resolution!"

Wetternheim disappeared through a door leading to the banking department. He flew back in a moment, foaming. Never in his life had he been so enraged. He flung on the table near Sullivan ten bills of the thousand-dollar variety.

"Will you join me in this?" he cried to his colleagues. "Or must I buy these paltry bonds myself from this braggart?"

"I'll take two thousand dollars' worth," said Mr. Gloutzman.

"One thousand for me," said Ebstern.

"Same!" echoed Ellenbogen, Van Strunk, Perkins, and Gansmere.

Cecil Guy Sterling was too slow to get in.

"How about the accrued interest?" asked Sullivan.

"You will receive a check for that as soon as it is figured," said Wetternheim sharply.

Sullivan picked up the ten thousand dollars and tucked it in his vest pocket.

"You did have the nerve, after all!" he said resignedly. "I didn't believe it was in you. And if you'll have a check for all accrued interest at my office before three o'clock to-morrow, I'll keep mum about that resolution. The story of that might not sound well."

He flung the parcel of bonds in the center of the table, strode from the room and from the bank, and was gone—a bluffer whose bluff had been called.

III

LATER that same afternoon James Gunwells, the alert Wall Street man of the New York *Blaze*, was standing in a Nassau Street barroom and peering into the opalescence of a silver fizz, when he became aware that next to him, and reaching for one of Magic Fred's dry Martinis, was Mr. Edward Sullivan, bond merchant. They were old friends.

"For goodness' sake, Ed," said the reporter, "give me *one* item of news. It's the dulllest day I ever met!"

Sullivan shook his head.

"Everything's slow," he replied. "Have another of those confectionery drinks? I need another Martini. I'm waiting until my car gets back from Staten Island. If you'll wait a few minutes, Jim, I'll take you to your office."

The drinks vanished, the car arrived, and away they went. At the office of the *Blaze*, Sullivan seemed to remember something.

"Get out your pencil, Jim," he said, "and I'll give you a bright, snappy item for your breezy young sheet. A newly formed syndicate of very conservative bankers to-day purchased, at par and accrued interest—don't forget the accrued interest—ten thousand dollars' of the 1869 issue of six-per-cent bonds of the Irish Republic, 'redeemable when Ireland shall be free and independent.' Good-by!"

SAFEGUARDING THE CONSUMER

WHAT GOVERNMENTAL INSPECTION IS DOING TO BAR OUT UNCLEAN AND ADULTERATED FOOD SUPPLIES

BY H. E. BARNARD

STATE FOOD AND DRUG COMMISSIONER OF INDIANA

"BAH!" said the old judge, as he swept his books and papers into his faded green bag. "There's no more liberty—nothing but rules, rules! And now the State Board of Health says a man mustn't spit on his own floor!"

Boiling with indignation as he recalled the latest restriction of his right, as an American citizen, to do as he pleased, he swept out of the court-room. He did not even glance at the jurymen who had spent all the morning and most of the afternoon in hearing the testimony of witnesses and the pleas of counsel in the case before the court.

The prisoner at the bar was a grocer who, so the State alleged, had violated the sanitary law by habitually making a cuspidor of the floor of his shop. That the jury did not see any undue interference with liberty of action in the rule of the health board which demanded decency and cleanliness in grocery-stores was shown by its prompt rendering of a verdict of "guilty."

The old judge's ideas were bred from life in a sparsely settled community where the individual could do as he pleased without trespassing on the rights of his neighbor. He expressed the same antipathy toward restraint as is felt by the manufacturer who sees in food and drug laws an abridgment of his right to do as he pleases, to make goods what he will, and to serve the consumer in his own way, without interference by inspectors or health officials.

The verdict of the jury, on the other hand, was in line with the modern idea that whatever is of benefit to the com-

munity at large should be done without regard to its effect on the individual. Out of this broader idea of the meaning of government have grown the medical inspection of schools, the sanitary supervision of dairies, bakeries, and markets, the examination of meat and meat products, the work of the food and drug inspector, and every other agency which, for the common good, imposes restrictions on individual action.

All of this work is new. Indeed, in many States it is but just beginning. Our oldest pure-food laws go back hardly more than a generation, and the sanitary officer's work for cleanliness in the handling of the food-supply is in its infancy. The first comprehensive sanitary law is not yet five years old, while the Federal food and drug statute, and the equally important but less known meat-inspection act, were adopted only seven years ago.

In passing, it is of interest, though somewhat mortifying, to recall that Moses laid down splendid sanitary laws for the children of Israel more than three thousand years ago, and that long before the Christian era Rome and Athens had inspectors of meats and markets. But if we have been a long time in establishing these very necessary regulations, it is none the less creditable to those States which have taken up the work in earnest to know that the laws are being administered thoroughly and efficiently.

The consumer is now pretty effectually safeguarded against adulterated food and against unclean food. Almost every inch of the long road between the farm and the kitchen is under the watchful eye of some

trained official. The character of the raw material, its method of manufacture, the manner in which it is transported, stored, and finally delivered to the consumer—all of these are regulated by law.

INSPECTING A CITY'S MILK SUPPLY

The most important of all the food-inspector's tasks is that of insuring purity and cleanliness in milk. Contamination of the milk-supply is particularly dangerous, because no other food enters so largely into the diet at the extremes of life, in infancy and old age. In its careless production and handling thousands of babies find sickness and death instead of health and growth. So let us go to the dairy to see what the government, through State or municipal agencies, is doing for its wards, the ordinary citizens who have not at hand the means for self-protection.

In the first place, the herd is made up of healthy, well-cared-for cows. They have been tested for tuberculosis and found free from that disease, now held to be communicable from the cow to the baby. They are stabled in a sanitary barn, with floors of cement, well cleaned, thoroughly ventilated, flooded with light.

The milk is drawn into covered buckets, protected from dirt and bacteria. It is cooled as soon as drawn to a temperature so low that the few bacteria which it is impossible to exclude do not multiply. It is then bottled in sterile glass, packed in ice, and delivered to the consumer before it is more than twenty-four hours old.

Such milk is food, instead of poison. It meets the standard of butter-fat and milk solids imposed by the pure-food law, and it satisfies every demand of the health officer who is striving to lower the death-rate in his city or district.

"That is all very well," you may say, "for the fortunate ones who live within reach of such dairies; but it is impossible for me to choose my milk supply. I must take what comes to my door!"

Not so. Every city—indeed, every community—is now equipped with a health organization that is watching the milk-supply. Somewhere within your reach there is a dairyman whose milk meets every sanitary and legal requirement. Hunt him out. His milk may, perhaps, cost a cent or two more per quart. Pay it, and be glad that you can do so. A cent a quart is not the only difference between the pure

milk of the inspected dairy and the filthy, bacteria-laden product of unknown herds.

THE FEDERAL INSPECTION OF MEAT

When the Federal meat-inspection law stationed a trained inspector at the door of every abattoir and slaughter-house in which meat was prepared for shipment in interstate commerce, a safeguard was thrown around the meat-supply that is of the greatest importance. Its value is not appreciated as it should be, because the consumer rarely gives a thought to the source of his steak and roasts. If the sirloin is tender, cooked to his taste, just rare and free from taint, it is quite satisfactory.

A visit to one of these inspected houses—there are hundreds of them; probably there is one in your city or town—will be a revelation to you. You will go away with a feeling of reverence for the oval purple stamp bearing the words "U. S. Inspected and Passed," which every piece of inspected meat carries.

You will find that the inspection begins as soon as the cattle and hogs from the farms of the great central States, which grow millions of bushels of corn every year to turn into choice meats, are unloaded from the stock-cars. At that point they undergo a preliminary examination by vigilant and keen-eyed government veterinarians, who cull out all animals suspected of disease. The rest of the shipment goes to the slaughtering-pens, and from there starts through the routine of the packing-house, which takes in live hogs at one end and turns out delicious hams and bacon, spicy sausage, and the finest of fresh meats, at the other.

As soon as the animal is killed it is seized by inspectors, and the entire body cavity is searched for any evidence of unsoundness. The examination is not confined to a superficial glance. The glands most subject to infection are cut open, and it is only when critical search shows absolutely no suggestion of disease that the carcass is passed on to the cooler.

The government does not stop its inspection after knowing that the meat is from sound, healthy animals. It regulates every detail of the packing-house operations. The methods used in rendering, pickling, and preserving are those approved by the authorities at Washington. The sanitary equipment and the method of

cleaning floors and benches and tools are not dictated, as formerly, by the manager of the packing-house, but by the chief inspector, who is responsible for the purity of its every product.

As an indication to the consumer that the meat has passed inspection, the government label, in the form of the oval purple stamp, is placed on every piece.

A FIELD FOR STATE AND CITY WORK

Some day our States and cities will do for their citizens what the Federal government is doing for the people at large. Until then less than half the entire meat-supply will be inspected; and the careless purchaser who does not demand inspected meat, or the less fortunate resident of places where the only meat-supply is that of the local butcher, will remain at the mercy of their tradesmen. Of course, many of these local butchers are careful to safeguard their customers; but too often they get their meat by buying the stock which the shrewd farmer was too wise to ship to an inspected market.

The sanitary food law has successfully passed the stringent trial of its first few years of enforcement, and is now accepted by manufacturers and dealers as the final touch of regulative authority. Its method of operation in the different States varies somewhat, but the most satisfactory work is done where the State health officials supervise it.

The work of the deputy health officer is both educational and corrective. In the enforcement of sanitary regulations which compel cleanliness of workshops and healthfulness of operatives, his training and method of work make him more competent than the food-inspector, whose chief duty, in the past, has been to play the detective and collect samples to be sent to the laboratory for analysis.

The sanitary inspector's entrance into the field has greatly changed the viewpoint of the manufacturer toward food legislation. The typical cannery, for instance, used to be an unsanitary shed, dirty, impossible of cleaning, unfitted with

sanitary conveniences and equipment. Nauseating were the impressions of the unfortunate individual who happened unwittingly to stray into such a place during the operating season.

To-day, it has become a real manufacturing plant, housed in suitably constructed buildings, with cement floors, sewer connection, abundance of water for flushing and washing, and efficient fly-screens. It is so organized and operated that the raw material which enters it goes to the warehouse a pure and wholesome article that will stand the test of the critical consumer.

CLEANLINESS IN BAKE-SHOP AND GROCERY

The modern bake-shop is built for the baker, and embodies in its construction the sanitary officer's latest ideas as to light and ventilation. Sewage systems are complete, and workrooms are amply supplied with well-trapped sinks.

The final chapter in bakery sanitation is now being written. The product of the oven is no longer distributed in unwrapped packages to the grocery-store and the consumer, but is wrapped in waxed paper, proof against dust and bacteria.

The grocer is safeguarding the consumer by abandoning his old haphazard methods of handling goods, and by installing dust-proof and vermin-proof bins and cases for the protection of dried fruits, crackers, cereals, and prepared foods of every description. He is giving his stock the same care while it is inside his store as it receives after it has reached the kitchen.

Every business which prepares food or handles it has responded to the call for cleanliness. The creamery, the candy or ice-cream factory, and even the restaurant kitchen, have met the test of the sanitary law. The record of improved conditions amply justifies our belief that the rules which compel care and cleanliness in the making and distribution of our food-supply are not only based on sound sanitary principles, but that they are a splendid development of the best ideas of a parental form of government.

LYRIC FLIGHTS

THOUGHTS truly wedded to melodious words—
Their bridal wings in ecstasy unfurled—
Are like a flock of silver-throated birds
Sent forth to gladden all the listening world.

William H. Hayne

EDITORIAL

AGAIN THE TWILIGHT ZONE

THE question whether California or Japan has the right in this controversy over alien land-ownership in the Golden State is not the only problem involved. A really larger question is whether California or the United States is to make our foreign policy. It opens anew the inquiry whether, before the world, this is to be a nation or a federation of semi-independent States.

The Constitution asserts that it, and treaties made under it, shall be the supreme law. The United States government has made a treaty with Japan. California passed a State law which Washington believed to be in violation of the treaty. The national administration opposed the measure; sent the Secretary of State to voice its opposition; pleaded for delay. But California went ahead.

The law being passed, the Federal government must change front and assume the position of defender of California's right to pass it. It may tell Japan, through the State Department, that it believes the statute to be in violation of the treaty; but through the Department of Justice, it must appear in court and defend that law's constitutionality!

All this contradiction results from the anomaly of having here a nation that sometimes is a nation and sometimes is a federation; that sometimes is ruled by a national sovereignty, and sometimes by a local sovereignty. There are twilight zones in every department of our affairs, from foreign relations to a farmers' cooperative association.

California isn't to blame for insisting on utilizing the utmost of her constitutional rights in dealing with what she esteems a grave local situation. She is not to blame for not being certain what is the exact limit of her constitutional rights. Nobody is certain. The government at Washington is not. The Supreme Court will have to decide it one day—and it, not being certain, will more than likely give a decision from a divided court.

The thing that's wrong is the system under which a government can be expected to govern, and yet never know its powers and limitations. Our twilight zones have engulfed the whole land in uncertainty. It's an impossible condition, and plainly it must be settled by a concentration somewhere of national authority—unquestioned, recognized, and clearly defined authority.

A NEEDED CHANGE IN POLITICAL METHODS

THERE has been introduced in Congress, by Senator Clapp, of Minnesota, a bill to prohibit Senators and Representatives serving as members of political committees, or soliciting campaign contributions. Should it pass, it would put an end to the Congressional campaign committee which each of the two old parties has long maintained to handle the party interest in the election of members of Congress.

NOTE—All editorials in this department were written before the end of May.

These committees are composed of members of the Senate and the House, one from each State. They perform a service which could more properly be done by the national committees. It is not pleasant to consider Congressmen running over to New York, Boston, Philadelphia, or somewhere else on one day to solicit campaign funds, and then hurrying back to Washington the next day, to vote on pending legislation which may intimately affect the very people who have been asked to contribute. That is the precise thing which has been done altogether too much by these committees.

Cleaner and more straightforward methods in politics and legislation are the demand of the times. For a lawmaker to be holding out one hand for contributions while casting his vote with the other is rather too suggestive of the hold-up.

"It comes as near to putting a gun in a man's face, and commanding him to deliver, as anything I can think of," said Senator Clapp when he introduced his bill.

The Senator headed the committee that investigated the whole subject of campaign contributions, and he was firmly convinced that the solicitation of funds and management of campaigns by members of Congress should be stopped. Everybody else who knows the evils of the thing agrees with him.

THE GETTYSBURG ANNIVERSARY

FIFTY years ago this July was fought the battle of Gettysburg. On that historic field, where North and South grappled at the height of the Confederacy's military power, the survivors of one of the world's epic conflicts now meet in amity and affection.

Few battles have so enriched history as that three days' struggle between the legions of Lee and the hosts of Meade. It gave American valor, irrespective of section, a fresh tradition. It turned the tide of war when the North was menaced by the invading forces of the South. Most lasting of all, perhaps, it added to literature our noblest piece of prose and our highest patriotic appeal—the immortal address of Lincoln.

In all the tumult of these strident times of progress it will be well for us to pause a moment and heed the lesson of that mighty battle and the moral of its costly victory so marvelously interpreted by the martyred President. Out of his homely lips, speaking on the consecrated ground of Gettysburg, came the most unforgettable appeal for real popular government.

THE COLONIZING AMERICAN

A FEW weeks ago a new president, Mario G. Menocal, was inaugurated in Cuba. He is a graduate of a great American university, and has been a student in one or two other American institutions. His technical education in the United States was the basis on which he builded a business career which, expanding into the activities of politics and affairs, brought him to the chief executive office of the island republic.

The Maderos, the originators of the revolution which is still in progress in Mexico, and which will never be ended till it ends with the rule of the real Mexican people, can count so many diplomas from American colleges that the number is hard to keep in mind without the services of a statistician.

The men who are reorganizing old China into new and republican China

are very largely products of American educational processes, inspired by political ideals which they absorbed in this country. Japan's unprecedented progress in every branch of civilization owes a large and frankly admitted debt to American instruction. Our teachers and our educational system are fast preparing the Filipinos for the fullest possible measure of self-government.

Speaking generally, the American public school and the university system; so closely related to it have been doing their full share of colonizing in the last two or three generations, and doing it in a highly creditable way.

THE COURAGE OF A CITY

THE city of Dayton, Ohio, has given the whole country an inspiring example of civic pride, courage, and optimism. Exactly two months after the factory whistles blew to warn the population that a great disaster was upon them, the whistles blew again to announce that the attempt to raise a fund of two million dollars for flood prevention had succeeded.

To raise such a fund under ordinary circumstances in a community of the size of Dayton is a serious task; to achieve it when the municipality is staggering to its feet after a devastating and well-nigh overwhelming calamity is nothing less than heroic. Amid the ruin left by the raging waters the citizens celebrated the completion of the fund with a monster celebration and parade in which millionaire and workman marched side by side, just as they had stood together in the bread-line a short time before, common sufferers in misfortune.

The slogan of the fund campaign was, "Remember the promises made in the attic." When the flood was at its height many people, marooned in upper floors and on roofs, made solemn promises as to what they would do if saved; and they are now fulfilling the vows registered amid death and suffering. The whole episode of Dayton's "never-say-die" attitude is typical of the buoyant American spirit—unconquerable and unafraid.

RAILROAD FINANCE AND RAILROAD SAFETY

IT is officially stated that in the third quarter of 1912 the number of deaths in railway accidents was nearly one-third greater than in the same period of 1911. Two-thirds of all the deaths in 1912 are attributed to defects in equipment.

For a long time there has been insistence that the margin of safety in railroad management was getting too narrow. Materials, supplies, wages, all cost more. Rates do not go up. The managers must work down to a finer and finer edge. They must get a little more wear all along the line. The ties cannot be replaced quite so soon. Engines and cars must see the repair-shop less frequently. Rails must stretch their lives a trifle.

If the railroad managers are enforcing these economies because they don't care for the reputations of their properties or the lives of their patrons, it should be known. If they are doing it because reckless financing has got their companies into dangerous condition, that should also be exposed. But if, as seems the reasonable judgment, these conditions exist because there is need for more revenue to meet the higher cost of everything the railroad buys, from bal-last to labor, then there ought to be definite determination of that point, and prompt provision to meet the need.

The request which some of the railroads have made for a small increase

in rates is moderate, indeed, compared to the additions to their pay-rolls. There would seem to be justification, even to the satisfaction of the most rabid corporation critic, for an increase of rates that would enable them to keep their track and equipment up to the highest standard of efficiency and safety.

THE SPREAD OF THE BLUE-SKY LAW

THE protective dome of the so-called blue-sky law of Kansas promises to become a nation-wide firmament. Twelve States have followed the lead of the pioneer Western commonwealth in placing statutory safeguards about the people's savings and checking fraud in the sale of securities, and as many are considering similar enactments.

The Investment Bankers' Association, a body whose opinion is worthy of consideration, has found fault with the original Kansas statute, mainly on the ground that it is unduly drastic, and that it unfairly hampers legitimate business. The association has prepared a model law which, it urges, would have the effect of preventing the open sale of fraudulent stocks and bonds, and at the same time would place no bar in the way of the honest dealer in sound securities. It provides for a censorship of the character of the vendors, and for supervision of corporations by the State Banking Department.

Now the big point at issue in any discussion of the Blue-Sky Law is not a quibble over the details of the statute, but the larger fact of the existence of such measures. When you put a law of this kind on the books of a State you put fear into the heart of the "get-rich-quick" artist and give courage and safety to the average man or woman with savings. The moral effect is tremendous. The sooner we arrive at the time when every State is "blue-skied," the sooner we shall have a valuable form of conservation.

THE PROBLEM OF THE SLUMS

A GROUP of earnest people at Washington recently discovered some slums which had long been pointed to with pride as proof that the American capital was a real city, with all the trimmings. These places are unsightly and insanitary alleys, lined with equally unsightly and insanitary shacks populated by people who live in such surroundings, not because they prefer to do so, but because they are poor and can't help it.

Out of some automobile tours of these regions, and some purposeful gatherings in the parlors of fashionable Massachusetts Avenue, a plan was devised for ridding the city of its slums. It was a splendid idea. Everybody wondered that it hadn't been thought of before. Everybody who hadn't been clever enough to attach himself or herself to the movement was green with envy, for it was reported that the first lady of the land was deeply interested in the plan. Awfully good form, socially!

And think how easy! The regenerators proposed that the government should buy the land occupied by the alley slums, raze the objectionable structures, turn their sites into parks, and substitute beauty for filth, breathing-spots for plague-places, light for darkness. To be sure!

Then somebody rudely asked what would become of the people turned out of the only habitations they can afford. Should they be chloroformed, deported, or merely declared unconstitutional?

That was a hard one; but further consideration of the problem led to the

exceedingly sane conclusion that the real way to get rid of slums was to have a municipal housing commission, to give it authority to condemn and remove, to build tenements owned by the city, and to rent them on possible terms to people who needed cheap homes. They are working on a project of this sort, and hope to try the experiment with the national government behind it.

MAKING THE DIRT FLY

IN considering the militant march of our cities we are apt to subordinate the really constructive to the spectacular. Vistas of towering structures outlined against the sky and the tumult and blare of the metropolitan advance are all right in their way, but there are other activities less blatant and more truly useful.

The "clean-up" weeks recently instituted by various American communities were interesting and suggestive incidents. Chicago and New York took the lead in this wholesome house-cleaning, and with splendid results. In both of these great cities—and few communities accumulate more dirt—a whole week was set apart by the authorities for a special cleansing under the direction of the local health department. Chicago, in particular, did the job thoroughly. A booklet setting forth the plan of the crusade was widely distributed. On the back was a picture of a woman riding a broomstick. Underneath was the following quatrain:

"Chicago, Chicago, Chicago," quoth I,
"Whither, oh, whither, oh, whither, so spry?"
"To clean up the alleys and chase out the fly;
Then I'll have fewer small coffins to buy!"

But why have this civic house-cleaning only in the spring-time? Dirt is not seasonal. Like the poor, it is with us always. To make it really effective, our cities will do well to make their crusade continuous. Then the clean-up idea will become a habit.

A WORLD-PLEA FOR THE BIRDS

UNLESS women stop using feathers on their hats, and unless the nations individually and in cooperation take steps to protect the feathered tribes, this is in the way of being a birdless world before so very long.

To some readers this may not suggest a grave calamity. But with the birds gone, insects of all sorts multiply; reptiles in turn increase, because they live by insects; and the habitability of a region thus affected is decidedly lessened. A birdless world would not only lack a great element of beauty, but would be a vastly harder one in which to make a living. The birds take from the farmer a very modest toll in return for their service in protecting his crops from insects. They are, in short, an important factor in nature's scheme of maintaining an economic balance.

Pleas for the birds have been made for years, with no effect save perhaps to increase the women's insistence on feathers. Many species, useful and beautiful, are now in imminent danger of extinction. If international action really is needed, as many believe, it ought to be invoked; but meantime a measure to discourage bird-slaughter by prohibiting the importation of their plumage would help a good deal. Americans are the greatest consumers of plumes—as of almost everything else that represents extravagance!

THE NATIONAL MONUMENT TO ABRAHAM LINCOLN

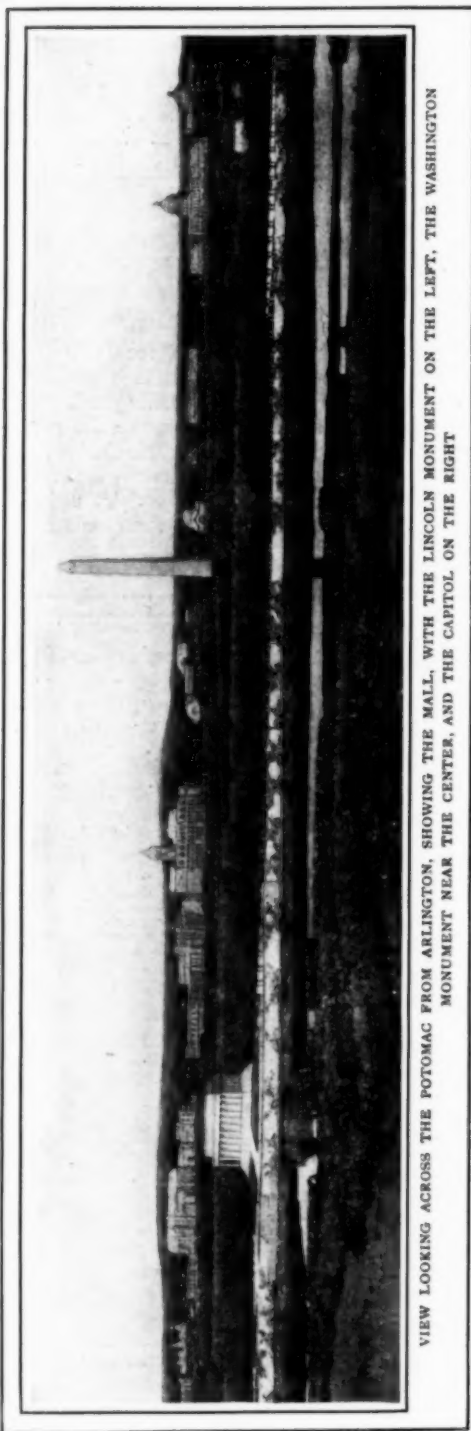
BY JUDSON C. WELLIVER

WHEN Congress, a few days before the end of the last session, passed the legislation providing for the erection of a memorial to Abraham Lincoln, it made, once and for all, the determination that our national capital is to be unique among cities, and of them all the most beautiful.

This is true, not because the particular

memorial that is provided for is in itself of such transcendent importance in the artistic development of Washington's "city beautiful" scheme, but because the evolution of the general plan had reached a point where an important variation from it might have been a first step toward its ultimate abandonment. Moreover, there was a determined effort to commit Congress to an





VIEW LOOKING ACROSS THE POTOMAC FROM ARLINGTON, SHOWING THE MALL, WITH THE LINCOLN MONUMENT ON THE LEFT, THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT NEAR THE CENTER, AND THE CAPITOL ON THE RIGHT

entirely different memorial to the great emancipator. The success of that movement would have meant a diversion of energies and expenditures from a carefully organized project of city improvement, and it might have been generations before interest and attention could have been once more focused upon the original scheme.

It is curious to note how accident and design have worked together to bring us to the present assurance that Washington is destined to be a city of striking individuality and surpassing attractiveness. As everybody knows, the broad general plan of the city was made by Major L'Enfant, a French engineer selected for that task by General Washington. The scheme of diagonally radiating avenues, some of them centering at the Capitol and others at circular parks scattered about the city, was L'Enfant's idea. The circles, embowered in turf and shrubs and splendid trees, constitute a chief beauty of the national capital.

Tradition brings to us the story that L'Enfant, who had lived through the French Revolution, believed that every great capital was likely some day to be the seat of revolutionary uprisings, and that it should be so planned as to facilitate the movement of soldiers through its streets. Therefore the French artilleryman, having in mind certain early experiences of Napoleon in quelling riots in Paris, devised his plan of circles and radiating avenues, in order to simplify the problem that some future Napoleon might confront in dealing with riot and revolution in Washington. Nothing could be simpler than to plant a park of artillery in each of these circles, and command every street and avenue approaching it. A few regiments of troops and plenty of grape and canister would insure the city's order.

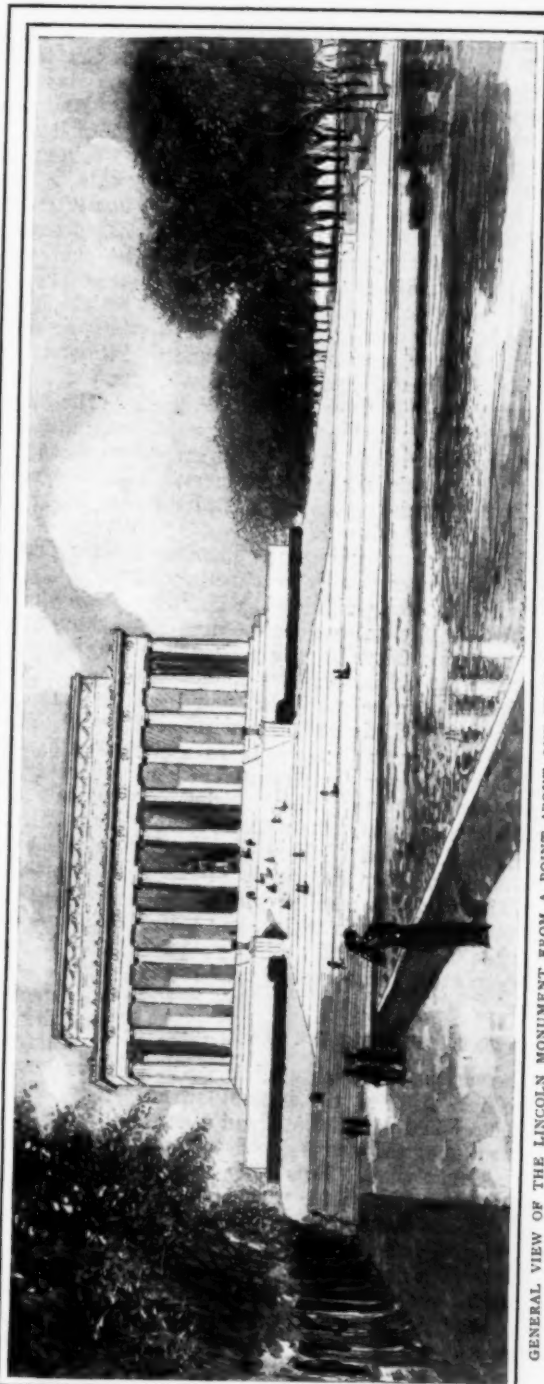
The military sharps assure us that L'Enfant was entirely right in dealing thus with what he conceived to be the prime problem in planning a great city. In truth, he builded vastly better than he thought, for while our capital has been happily spared the necessity of testing the military advantages of this plan, the scheme has peculiarly fitted itself to the national purpose of making

Washington a capital of peace and beauty. The circles have become, in the processes of the city's development, breathing-places, flower-gardens, and beauty-spots, rather than vantage-points of military power.

The Capitol, the most important and impressive building in the western world, was located where it is by L'Enfant. Here again we stumble upon another of those curious accidents which have so often interfered with the literal development of the founder's plan. L'Enfant faced his Capitol toward the east, looking out upon the fine plateau which is the summit of Capitol Hill. It was his purpose and Washington's expectation that the city should lie in that direction. So the west front of the Capitol, as first erected, was backed up rather ungracefully to the declivity of Capitol Hill, and was about as attractive as the rear view of a present-day storage-warehouse.

But the best-laid plans of mice and men and landscape engineers sometimes miscarry. A coterie of real-estate speculators, confident that some day there would be several thousand people in Washington, proceeded to corner the slightly property to the east of the Capitol, and to hold it for prices so high that the town was compelled to grope in precisely the opposite direction.

In the end, however, as with Major L'Enfant's spattering of circular military reservations, the event proved that destiny and the real-estate sharps had worked together to achieve an even better result than



GENERAL VIEW OF THE LINCOLN MONUMENT FROM A POINT ABOUT ONE THOUSAND FEET DISTANT—THE COLONNADE IS TO BE ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTY-EIGHT FEET LONG, CONSISTING OF WHITE MARBLE COLUMNS FORTY-FOUR FEET HIGH

architects and ordnance experts had had in mind. It became necessary to make a new front for the Capitol out of what had been intended to be its rear; and this accounts for the terraced approach from the west, which makes the structure so completely fulfil the ideal of an architectural "pile."

Washington's development has been marked by an interesting series of these accidents which enforced deviations from the original plans. The selection of the design and location of the Lincoln Memorial, however, presents one case of adherence to a scheme laid out long in advance; and it is certain to have a very important bearing upon the future beautification of the city.

Following generally the ideas of Washington and L'Enfant, the capital grew in rather a haphazard fashion during its early decades. There is a characteristic story that tells how Andrew Jackson located the Treasury Building where it is.

The Congressional and other authorities had squabbled interminably over the problem, until Jackson, disgusted with the whole performance, set out one morning to decide the thing himself. He picked his way among the gullies and tree-stumps of Pennsylvania Avenue until he found a place that satisfied his notion of a proper site. Perhaps having in mind the acrimonious debate over the relations of the Treasury to the "money power," he thought it would be well to have the nation's financial office where the White House could always keep a sharp eye on it. At any rate, Old Hickory is credited with placing the Treasury where it is to-day, and where it necessitated a huge and unsightly "jog" in the splendid sweep of Pennsylvania Avenue.

THE WORK OF THE PARK COMMISSION

These various accidents and interferences had so far distorted the general scheme from the original design that about a dozen years ago Congress was induced to create a Park Commission. This body was directed to study the whole problem of the city's plan and development, with the purpose of laying out a general and consistent project by which the location of parks, boulevards, avenues, public buildings, bridges, and the like should be guided in the future.

The head of this commission was the late Daniel H. Burnham, who laid out the splendid scheme of grounds and buildings

for the Columbian Exposition at Chicago, and to whose genius is due a world's verdict that in its conception and execution was achieved the world's masterwork of landscape design and architectural adornment.

Volumes have been written about the noble project for an ideal capital which finally came from the work of the Burnham commission. In a sentence, it may be said that the commission rescued the original plans from the obsolescence in which unguided development was fast burying them, and fitted them to the possibilities of the present and the needs of the future.

The sweeping ground-plan of Washington that is now accepted as the general guide for future work represents the ideas of General Washington, of L'Enfant, and of Burnham, as modified by various accidents of municipal growth and Congressional legislation. Its basic feature is the Mall, a splendid public park lying between Pennsylvania Avenue on the north and the Potomac River on the south and extending from the Capitol at its eastern end to the Lincoln Memorial at its western. On the east and west axis of the Mall will stand the Grant Monument, at the foot of Capitol Hill; the Washington Monument, about a mile west of this, and practically midway of the park; and finally the Lincoln Memorial, another mile farther west, on the bank of the Potomac.

Thus from the west front of the Capitol one will get a vista of the nation's memorials to Grant, Washington, and Lincoln, planted in the generous expanse of the Mall's two miles of trees, turf, shrubs, and winding pathways. Beyond all this, the splendid Memorial Bridge just authorized by Congress will stretch away across the blue Potomac to beautiful Arlington Cemetery, linking the Mall and its memorials to the glorious green hills of Virginia and the last resting-place of the thousands of the nation's soldiers who there lie buried.

In the outworking of this plan, various splendid public buildings will be erected in or facing the Mall. This open space is to be connected at either end with a great encircling series of boulevards and parks that will sweep around and through the city. Rock Creek Park will be one link in this chain, and the beautiful grounds of the Soldier's Home another. Some of the sections have but recently been authorized by

Congress, and are not yet developed; others have still to look to future Congresses for authorizations and appropriations; but there is little doubt that within a comparatively few years the entire scheme will have been provided for.

RIVAL MEMORIAL PROJECTS

The determination that the Lincoln Memorial should be erected on the Mall, and thus constitute one more substantial guarantee for the execution of this great plan, was not reached without a long and hard fight. Important and powerful local interests in Washington sought to have another location selected. There was also a nation-wide and strongly backed demand that the memorial to the martyred President should take the form of a highway from Washington to the battle-field of Gettysburg.

Plans were finally prepared for a splendidly simple and massive Greek temple to be erected on the Mall; and the question between the adoption of these plans and the construction of the Gettysburg Highway was presented to Congress last winter for determination. By an overwhelming vote, that body chose the temple, and rejected, at least for the time being, the highway.

The Gettysburg project will probably be revived, and in time it may be carried into effect; but it will be an independent improvement, a supplement to rather than a

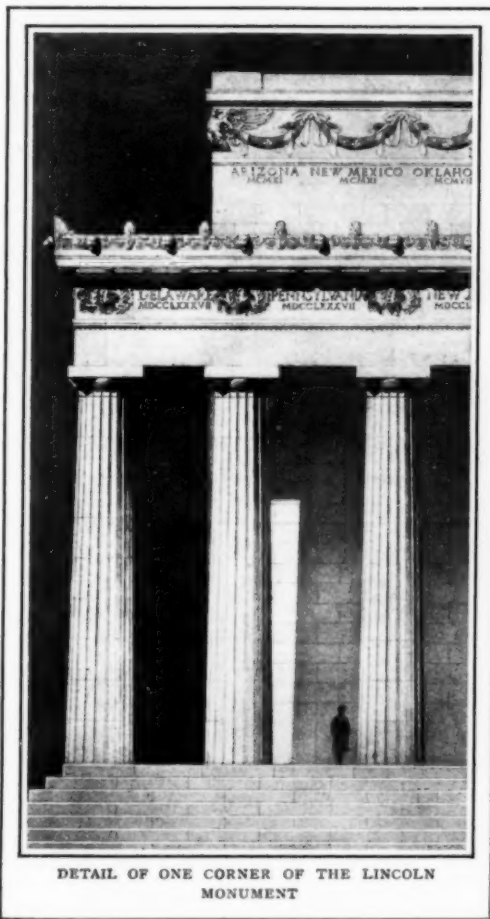
diversion from the noble conception that has been evolved from the dreams of L'Enfant into the plans of Burnham and the assured accomplishment of another generation.

The Lincoln Memorial will be in the form of a marble temple of the purest Greek architecture. Its designer is Henry Bacon, of New York. Perhaps no better suggestion of its character and impressiveness has been given than in the words of the late John Hay, who said:

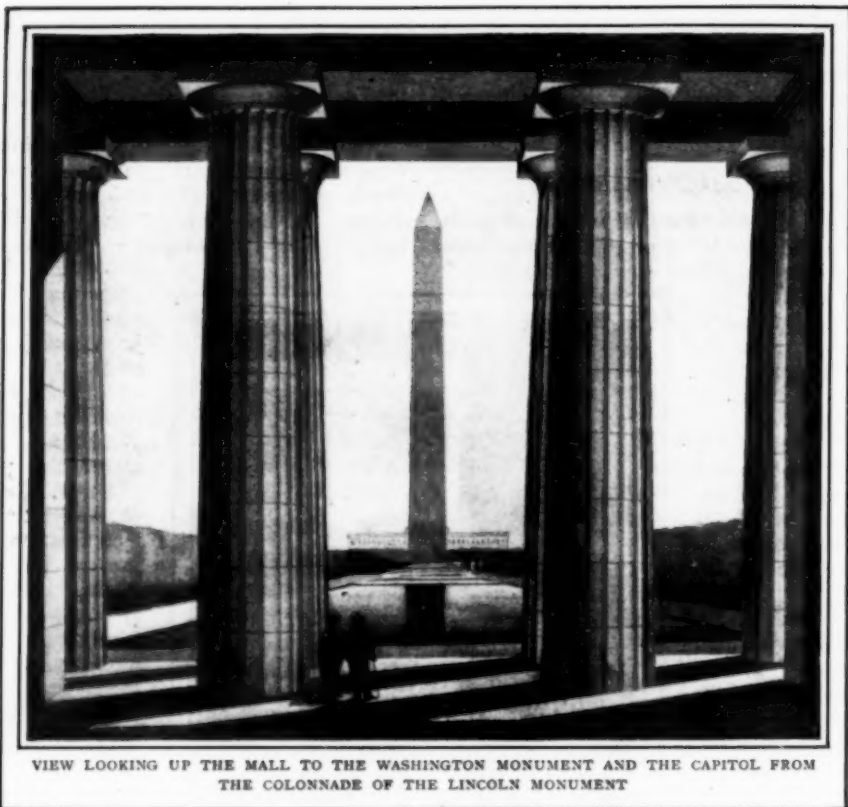
"Lincoln, of all Americans next to Washington deserves the place of honor. He was of the immortals. You must not approach too close to the immortals. His monument should stand alone, remote from the common habitations of man, apart from the business and turmoil of the city—isolated, distinguished, and serene. Of all the sites this one near the Potomac is most suited to the purpose."

Mr. Bacon surely had in mind those eloquent specifications of Mr. Hay. He plans first, by a series of terraces, to raise the ground-level at the site of the memorial so that

it will be forty-five feet higher than the general grade of the park. To secure this elevation, there will be a circular terrace eleven feet high and one thousand feet in diameter. On its outer edge will be planted four concentric rows of trees, leaving in the center a plateau seven hundred and fifty-five feet in diameter.



DETAIL OF ONE CORNER OF THE LINCOLN MONUMENT



In the center of this plateau will rise an eminence supporting a terraced wall of masonry fourteen feet high, two hundred and fifty-six feet long, and one hundred and eighty-six feet wide. Crowning the terrace will stand the pure white marble memorial. Three steps eight feet high form a platform under the columns, two hundred and four feet long and one hundred and thirty-four feet wide.

The colonnade is to be one hundred and eighty-eight feet long and one hundred and eighteen feet wide, the marble columns being forty-four feet high and seven feet and five inches in diameter at the base. The total height of the structure above the terrace is ninety-nine feet.

Mr. Bacon's conception of the most appropriate memorial to Lincoln was that it should be composed of four features—a statue of Lincoln himself, a memorial of the Gettysburg speech, another of the second inaugural address, and finally a symbol of the Union which he saved. The

statue of Lincoln will occupy the central memorial hall. Within this imposing chamber no other object except the heroic effigy of the Emancipator will be placed. At either side will be smaller halls—one containing the memorial of the second inaugural, the other that of the Gettysburg address. The speeches will be shown in bronze letters on a monumental tablet.

The symbol of the Union is found in a colonnade surrounding the walls within which the memorials are enclosed—a colonnade of thirty-six pillars, one for each State existing at the time of Lincoln's death. On the walls above the colonnade will be placed forty-eight festoons, one for each State of the present Union.

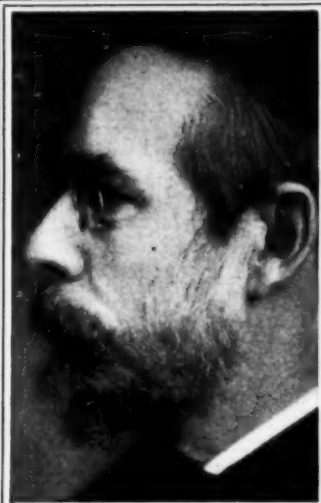
In brief, this is the simple, dignified, noble memorial that is planned for Lincoln. Mr. Bacon believed that the same splendid simplicity which lay at the bottom of the great President's character should also give dominating tone and quality to an appropriate memorial in his honor.

CONCERNING COOK-BOOKS

BY BRANDER MATTHEWS

PROFESSOR OF DRAMATIC LITERATURE IN COLUMBIA
UNIVERSITY

The Interest and Importance
of Gastronomic Literature, and
the Relation between Good
Cooking and Right Living



A FEW years ago there appeared in *Punch* a drawing which represented a charity visitor calling at the humble home of a poor old dame and asking if she had received a volume of cooking-receipts which had been promised. "Oh, yes, my lady," was the response of the poor old dame; "I got the book, thank you kindly; but I'd sooner have had the ingriddiments!"

I wonder whether this is not the attitude of the majority of mankind who like good things to eat, but who are incurious about the delicate art by which they have been compounded. Yet some of us there are who can find delight in turning over any collection of receipts, and more especially in studying those rarer tomes which discuss the fundamental principles of the gastronomic art. And a few men or women are so favored by nature with gustatory imagination that they can almost taste on their palates the viands which they chance to find described in print. This is a most welcome gift, for it is always easier to get a cook-book than it is to acquire the "ingrid-diments."

It is possibly a part of the Puritan tradition, which has spread from New England

through the middle States and the middle West, that many Americans seem to feel it immoral to acknowledge their enjoyment of the pleasures of the table. They would assert that they eat only to live; and they would think scorn of the sybarite who should confess that he lived only to eat. But are there any such sybarites capable of going so far to the other extreme? Why should not a healthy man eat not only to live, but to enjoy? Why should he not feel it as much his duty to cultivate a taste for good cookery as to cultivate a taste for good writing or for good painting? After all, cookery is one of the fine arts, even if it may be termed the humblest of them, and even if no one of the Muses was told off by the Greeks to guard it and to cherish it and to inspire its practitioners.

MAN IS A COOKING ANIMAL

What separates man from the lower animals is that he can cook his food, and that he does cook it—and that they don't. Man has been called the only animal who laughs; but there are birds and beasts with the power of cachination. Man has been termed a thinking animal; but who shall assert that the dog and the beaver are devoid of

EDITOR'S NOTE—Previous numbers of this series of talks upon current literary topics, by Brander Matthews, have been as follows: "Who's Who in Fiction" (March), "Books on the Drama" (April), "Modern Essays" (May), and "A String of Short Stories" (June).

all ability to think? Man has been described as a political animal; and yet there are insects which live in a highly organized society. But none of the lower animals can cook; and this may be accepted as a sufficient explanation of the fact that they have remained lower animals. And if man alone in the animal world has the privilege of cooking, there is no good reason why he should be ashamed of the pleasure he can derive from this human art.

In Franklin's wise letter on the "Art of Procuring Pleasant Dreams," he asserts that "in general mankind, since the improvement of cookery, eat about twice as much as nature requires." And this is quite as true to-day as it was when Franklin penned it. But this is only because men have not learned to control their appetites. The true epicure is not a gross feeder; he is *gourmet* and not *gourmand*, to use the useful French discrimination—which does not exist in our ruder Anglo-Saxon tongue. The true epicure eats sparingly, knowing that satiety is fatal to enjoyment.

A MIRACLE OF SELF-CONTROL

Perhaps, on occasion, the true epicure may even forego the actual taking of food, finding a sufficient pleasure in the sight of it and the odor of it, without the taste of it. Of course, an epicure of this delicacy of imagination must be rare indeed, but he is not non-existent, if we may believe a recent French book on the eighteenth century.

In this volume there is an account of a wealthy Parisian high-liver so devoted to the delights of the table that when the physicians reduced him to a strict regimen and forbade his indulgence in the good things of life, he refused to surrender the privilege of playing host. He continued to give banquets and to sit at the head of the table, although he could not himself partake of the exquisite delicacies he provided for his guests. Heroically he refrained from the tempting viands due to his lifelong experience and his lavish liberality. It was only by sight and by smell that he was able to share the gustatory bliss of his friends; and he seems to have been content with this vicarious satisfaction of his palate. A student of the history of philosophy might be puzzled to decide whether his attitude was Stoic or Epicurean.

Perhaps a miracle of self-control like this was possible only in France, where cookery

is most appreciated. Perhaps it may become possible here in these United States when we have attained to a more general understanding of the true principles of the culinary art.

SIGNS OF A CULINARY RENASCENCE

There are now signs not a few that we are on the eve of a gastronomic renaissance. At least we are awakening to the deficiencies of our methods of food-supply and to the necessity for a better knowledge of the best methods of preparing our food when it is supplied. Both in periodicals and books the subject is receiving increased attention; and while some of this discussion is overvehement, some of it is likely to be helpful. And there never was a decade when more American cook-books were published, or when the general average of those useful treatises was higher.

Strictly speaking, no one of the three books which are to be discussed in this paper is a true cook-book, a collection of kitchen receipts, a rival of the excellent "Century Cook-Book," or of Marion Harland's invaluable "Common Sense in the Household," honored in many an American home for more than twoscore years. And only one of these three volumes is a recent publication; indeed, the other two will be sought in vain on any list of the latest books, since one of them is nearly ten years old and the other first appeared more than thirty years ago. Young or old, all three have their messages for us to-day, and the message of the oldest of the three is not the least important.

These three volumes are "Food and Flavor, a Gastronomic Guide to Health and Good Living," by Mr. Henry T. Finck; "My Cookery Books," by Mrs. Elizabeth Robins Pennell; and "Food and Feeding," by the late Sir Henry Thompson, the distinguished British surgeon—a treatise so suggestive that it is now in its twelfth edition, which the author called the final issue, containing his last words upon the proper nourishment of man. And perhaps one reader of the first edition may be permitted to express here his personal satisfaction that a book so wise in its teaching and so sound in its doctrine should have reached so large a circle of readers.

One of these books is British; one is American; and one is by an American who has spent most of her life abroad. Let me take the British book first, partly because

it is the oldest, and partly because it is the most stimulating.

Sir Henry Thompson was an undevout gastronome, who held eating to be an important duty, and who regretted that many of his countrymen treated it as they were disposed to treat their religious duties—"namely, as an observance irksome but unfortunately necessary to be performed." He was long famous in London as the successor of Samuel Rogers and of Lord Houghton in the giving of breakfasts, midday banquets at which the fare was not more dextrously chosen than the company. Bearing in mind the sage maxim that for the full success of a feast the guests should never number less than the Graces or more than the Muses, Sir Henry limited his invitations to a double quartet, and used to speak of them as his "octaves." To these octaves the best in London were glad to be bidden. Indeed, Sir Henry was a little vain of the fact that his invitations were rarely declined; and I recall his telling me thirty years ago that when his fellow physician, Oliver Wendell Holmes, was asked to select for himself the half-dozen other guests, every one of the very distinguished men with whom the autocrat desired to sit at meat gladly responded to the summons.

Sir Henry was a right Englishman; and in "Food and Feeding" he was seeking to arouse his fellow islanders from a pitiable condition of gastronomic lethargy. Therefore many pages of this book are calculated solely for the meridian of Greenwich. Many other pages, however, transcend the local conditions of the island which the disgusted Frenchman described as having "thirty religions and only one sauce." And even the purely British passages have a curious interest for us, since they reveal the condition of our kin across the sea.

COOKERY AND NATIONAL CHARACTER

In a recent novel by Mrs. Wharton, a clever American girl asserts that cooking always expresses the national character, and that French food is clever and amusing just because the French people are. She ventures the ingenious suggestion that at dinners in private houses the dishes always resemble the talk, and that the same platitudes seem to go into the mouths of the guests and to go out of them. And finally she declares that she knows just what kind of bill of fare would result if a fairy

should wave a wand and suddenly turn the conversation at a London dinner into joints and puddings.

As it happens, Sir Henry Thompson has given an adequate explanation of the fundamental difference between the cookery of London and of Paris. He ascribes it to the difference in the quality of the uncooked food. In London the market affords fresher fish and better beef and mutton and game than the market in Paris. Therefore the best British cooks serve meats in prime condition, and as simply as possible, so that the native flavor is in no way impaired. Therefore, again, the best French cooks seek to disguise the comparative toughness of their meats by culinary manipulations and by artistically concocted sauces and dressings and accompaniments. In other words, British cooking at its best is very simple, as in roast beef and saddle of mutton and fried sole; while French cooking at its best is the reverse of simple, seeking to disguise the insipidity of veal with "delicious adventitious flavors."

And Sir Henry quoted Brillat-Savarin's saying that "poultry is to the cook what canvas is to the painter." The Englishman loves the flavor of the meat itself at its best, and wants only gravy and not sauce; whereas the Frenchman is so successful with his ingeniously contrived sauces that "he is too often tempted to extend his art to dark-fleshed game, and, seeking to adorn it with new flavors, he destroys the original savor and aroma."

This last is the error of judgment often committed here in America by so-called French cooks—who frequently come from Italy or Germany. The best American cooking conforms to the British standard in the supreme simplicity of the planked shad, for example, and of the canvasback duck—now, alas, too seldom seen!—served only with samp and currant jelly. On the other hand, there are triumphs of American cookery—chicken fried in cream, for one—in which there is an acceptance of the French method. Hunger is the best sauce if you have the best meat; but in default of the best meat and of a good appetite, there is always an opportunity for "delicious adventitious flavors."

COOKERY AND SOCIAL CONVENTIONS

Here lies the explanation of a divergence in social usage which has often puzzled observers of the manners and customs of

"society," so-called. In England it is bad form to sop bread in any sauce, whereas in France this is not contrary to the severest code of table manners. Now there is reason in all things; and social conventions are ultimately based on the solid rock of common sense. In London a man must not dip bread into his plate, because only a foolish person would desire any more of any British sauce than he could avoid. But in Paris a man is foolish who does not profit by every opportunity to get as much of the "delicious adventitious flavor" as he possibly can, either on his meat or with the aid of his roll.

It is the varied art of the Gallic masters of gastronomy which gives validity to the French maxim, "appetite comes with eating." And yet we cannot withhold sympathy from the Parisian epicure who once denied the truth of this saying, with the explanation that he had been eating for two hours and his appetite had not yet come.

HENRY T. FINCK'S "FOOD AND FLAVOR"

Mr. Finck's stout tome on "Food and Flavor" is irritating in the slovenliness of its structure and the scrappiness of its style. It is far too long, and it contains far too many excrescences and trivialities. It is padded out by needless details from the author's own autobiography. It is a heterogeny of fragmentary quotations from all sorts of sources—books, newspaper articles, and government reports. It is aggressive in temper and intolerant in tone. It lacks the scientific unity of Sir Henry Thompson's more persuasive book.

In other words, Mr. Finck has not given us a good book; and this is a great pity, because he has abundant knowledge and his doctrine is sound. What he has to say is well worth saying, even if he has not said it well. But, after all, he has said it somehow, and his message is one which we need to hear and to heed. Even if his book is not so good as it might be, it will do good; and it is to be hoped that its deficiencies of taste will not unduly interfere with the circulation of its suggestions among American housewives. Even if his manner is that of hasty journalism, much of his matter is useful. His haphazard quotations are often valuable in themselves, and they serve to direct the reader to the books from which they are taken. Indeed, one obvious merit of this

volume is that it incidentally cites so many other volumes dealing with gustatory topics.

A NEW GASTRONOMIC THEORY

The exciting cause of this book is Mr. Finck's belief that he has made a scientific discovery. He asserts that mere taste does not account for our delight in certain dishes, and that this delight is due mainly, if not solely, to the appeal of those dishes to our sense of smell. He maintains with all the emphasis of italics that "with the exception of sweet, sour, salt, and bitter, all our countless gastronomic delights come to us through the sense of smell." He holds that our pleasure in flavors is derived from the fragrance we inhale through the nose while eating; and from this principle he deduces most of his gastronomic dictums. He first set forth this theory twenty-five years ago, and he has unavailingly sought to find a psychologist who had anticipated him.

Now, whether or not Mr. Finck is the discoverer of this principle, and whether or not the principle itself is as all-inclusive as he maintains, the theory is interesting. It does explain many gustatory sensations not otherwise as easily explicable. And its acceptance will hasten the demand for meats and vegetables and fruits sent to market in the best possible condition, with all their aroma retained to titillate our nostrils.

Mr. Finck has traveled far afield in his investigations into the cookery of the leading races; and he is acute in appreciating the special qualities of the more significant national dishes. He does not hold a brief in defense of the food markets or the culinary methods of any one people, setting forth the strong points of every nationality and passing lightly over the weaker spots. Many of the conditions he here describes will be unknown to most Americans; and his descriptions will aid in arousing public interest here in the United States, and in exciting us to procure for ourselves advantages which the Germans and the Danes now enjoy.

Although Mr. Finck is prolific in praise of foreign markets and of foreign dishes, he is as frankly eulogistic of the best that we have to proffer on this side of the Atlantic. We have much to learn from abroad, no doubt—but then abroad has something to learn from us. We have been the first to profit by the grapefruit and by

the Casaba melon. We have clam chowder; and when it is prepared in its simple perfection it is incomparable in its kind. We have green corn on the cob; and that "the effete monarchies of despotic Europe" may vainly envy. We have terrapin and we have—or at least we had—the canvasback. Then there is the humble succotash; there is the buckwheat cake with its maple sirup; and there is pumpkin pie, beloved of Emerson. Never did the sage of Concord more largely display his insight into the nature of things than when a young lady at table with him asked in surprise:

"Oh, Mr. Emerson, do you eat pie?"

"But what is pie for?" he replied promptly.

That noble response sounds the ultimate depths of all philosophy.

COOK-BOOKS OF MANY LANDS

Mrs. Pennell, the author of the third of the volumes under consideration, "My Cookery Books," has a philosophy of her own. The "ingriddiments" may be inferior or may even fail altogether, but the cook-books themselves always retain the quaint flavor of their century and their nationality; and so she has devoted herself in the intervals of travel and in the interstices of art criticism to the collecting of the culinary manuals of all countries and of all ages.

No one who has not undertaken a kindred accumulation can guess the keen pleasure to be derived from an eager search for the less frequently found volumes in any special field. Indeed, seeking is perhaps a more acute joy than having. And there is no danger of satiety, because there is no possibility of completing a collection of such things. The seeker is forever discovering treatises hitherto unknown even to fellow collectors; and he is also finding out that certain longed-for items are finally unprocurable because of their intangible rarity.

In the exhilarating introduction to the

catalogue of her precious possessions, Mrs. Pennell asserts that "everybody eats and everybody should enjoy eating," since the old asceticism "that held pleasure in food to be gluttony, and consequently one of the seven deadly sins, has all but disappeared." She thinks that even if eating were not one of the fine arts, the books she has gathered would still be amusing. And to her readers she has succeeded in making even a catalogue of them amusing. Here, for example, is one seventeenth-century title-page:

The Queen's Closet Opened. Incomparable Secrets in Physick, Chirurgery, Preserving, Candyng, and Cookery; as they were presented to the Queen by the most Experienced Persons of our times, many whereof were honoured with her own practice, when she pleased to descend to these more private Recreations. Never before published. Transcribed from the true Copies of her Majesties own Receipt-Books by W. M., one of her late servants. Printed for Nathaniel Brook at the Angel in Cornhill, 1655.

Who would not desire to possess so precious a tome, not only for its own sake, but also to be taken privily into "her majesty's closet"? Who would not like to glance through the pages of the manual by Edward Kidder, pastry-maker, with his superbly unsimplified spelling of *sauce-ages*? And who will not long for the privilege of perusing "Adam's Luxury and Eve's Cookery; or, the Kitchen-Garden Display'd"—a book printed for Dodsley in 1744?

As for "The English House-Wife, Containing the Inward and Outward Vertues Which Ought to Be in a Compleate Woman"—well, it seems a pity that this noble work is not widely distributed among the militant suffragettes, especially as the edition of 1631 declared itself to be "now the fourth time much augmented, purged, and made most profitable and necessary for all men, and the generall good of the kingdome."

THE PRISONER

No iron bar or bolted door
Or sleepless eye prevents his flight;
World-weary, sick at heart, and sore,
His day is little more than night.

The open field, the mountain stream,
To him a paradise would be;
The city street, there he must dream—
Harsh prison-keeper, poverty!

Will Herbert

THE LIGHT OF WESTERN STARS*

BY ZANE GREY

AUTHOR OF "RIDERS OF THE PURPLE SAGE," ETC.

SYNOPSIS OF CHAPTERS PREVIOUSLY PUBLISHED

ALFRED HAMMOND, the wayward son of a rich New Yorker, has left home to become a cattleman in New Mexico, and for several years has had little communication with his family. His sister, Madeline, known to her friends as "Majesty"—aged twenty-four, and possessed of a fortune of her own—suddenly decides to visit him. She telegraphs to him, but when her train arrives at El Cajon, about midnight, he is not at the station.

Her reception is a startling one. There has been a wedding at El Cajon that evening, and Gene Stewart, a reckless cowboy, has made a drunken wager that he will marry the first girl who comes to town. Encountering Miss Hammond at the station, he strips off her glove to see if she has a wedding-ring. Finding none, he drags in a terrified Mexican priest, and forces him, at the muzzle of a revolver, to hurry through some form of words, which Madeline is too utterly dazed to understand. The strange ceremony is broken off, however, when Stewart learns that she is Alfred Hammond's sister. He takes her to the house where her brother's fiancée, Florence Kingsley, lives with a married sister.

Here, in the morning, Alfred and Madeline meet. She finds that her brother has not prospered in business, and that he is now foreman on Bill Stillwell's ranch. Gene Stewart is deeply repentant, but the expected trouble between him and Alfred Hammond is averted by Madeline's diplomatic version of the events of the previous night. That same day, however, Stewart gets into a fight with Pat Hawe, the sheriff, and to escape Hawe's vengeance he "hits the trail" for Mexico. Another cowboy, Danny Mains, also disappears mysteriously, after being sent out with money to pay Stillwell's hands.

On the next day Madeline goes out with Florence, Alfred, and a party of cowboys, to Stillwell's ranch in the foot-hills fifty miles from El Cajon. Here she sees the round-up and encounters a Mexican ranchman, Don Carlos, with whom Stillwell is on bad terms. A few mornings later she comes out on the porch of the ranch-house, which is an old and somewhat dilapidated Spanish building, to find Stillwell and her brother watching a riderless horse that is nearing the ranch. To their surprise, the animal proves to be Gene Stewart's splendid black charger.

X (continued)

THE wild hollow sloping up into the foot-hills lay open to unobstructed view, and less than half a mile distant Madeline saw the riderless horse coming along the white trail at a rapid canter. A piercing whistle pealed in.

"Wal, he's seen us, thet's sure," said Bill.

The horse neared the corrals, disappeared into a lane, and then, breaking his gait again, thundered into the enclosure and pounded to a halt some twenty yards from where Stillwell waited for him.

One look at him at close range, in the clear light of day, was enough for Madeline to award him a blue ribbon over all horses, even her prize-winner, White Stockings. The cowboy's great steed was no lithe, slender-bodied trotter or pacer. He was a charger, almost tremendous of build, with a black coat faintly mottled in gray, shining like polished glass in the sun. Evidently he had been carefully dressed down for this occasion, for there was no dust on him, nor a kink in his beautiful mane, nor a mark on his glossy hide.

"Come hyar, you son of a gun!" said Stillwell.

* This story began in the May number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

The horse dropped his head, snorted, and came up. He was neither shy nor wild. He poked a friendly nose at Stillwell and then looked at Al and the women.

Unhooking the stirrups from the pommel, Stillwell let them fall, and began to search the saddle for something which he evidently expected to find. Presently, from somewhere among the trappings, he produced a folded bit of paper, and after scrutinizing it, handed it to Al.

"Addressed to you, an' I'll bet you two bits I know what's in it," he said.

Alfred unfolded the letter, read it, and then looked at Stillwell.

"Bill, you're a pretty good guesser. Gene's made for the border. He sent the horse by somebody, no names mentioned, and wants my sister to have him if she will accept."

"Any mention of Danny Mains?" asked the rancher.

"Not a word."

"Thet's bad. Gene'd know about Danny if anybody did; but he's a close-mouthed cuss. So he's sure hittin' fer Mexico! Wonder if Danny's goin' too. Wal, that finishes two of the best cowmen I ever seen, an' I'm sorry."

With that he bowed his head and, grumbling to himself, went into the house. Lifting the reins over the head of the horse, Alfred led him to Madeline, slipped the knot over her arm, and placed the letter in her hand.

"Majesty, I'd accept the horse," he said. "Stewart is only a cowboy, and as tough as any I've known; but he had a better education than most cowboys, and I've seen him show such fine feeling as you'd scarcely expect in one of his kind. I liked him pretty well before he thrashed Pat Hawe, and afterward I guess I liked him more. Read the letter, sister."

Madeline bent her gaze from her brother's face to the letter, which ran thus:

FRIEND AL:

I'm sending my horse down to you because I'm going away and haven't the nerve to take him where he'd get hurt or fall into strange hands.

Maybe it's not just proper what I'm going to ask you, but I'm thinking most of the horse. If it's proper and all right—why, give him to your sister with my respects. And say that if there ever was a horse gentle and noble enough to be worthy of carrying her, he is.

But if you don't like the idea, Al, or if she won't have him—then he's for you. I'm not forgetting your kindness to me, even if I never showed it. And Al, my horse has never felt a quirt or a spur, and I'd like to think you'd never hurt him. It's some strange that a cow-puncher is afraid to have his horse hurt, but this horse was more like a brother to me.

I'm hoping your sister will take him. She'll be good to him, and she can afford to take care of him. You see, Al, I'm all selfish in this deal, thinking of the horse. And that's on the square. All the same, I'm not forgetting your sister's kind words to me. And, while I'm waiting to be plugged by a greaser bullet, if I happen to have a picture in mind of how she'll look up on my horse—why, man, it's not going to make any difference to you. She needn't ever know it.

Between you and me, Al, don't let her or Flo ride alone over Don Carlos's way. If I had time, I could tell you something about that slick greaser. Tell your sister, if there's ever any reason for her to run away from anybody when she's up on that roan, just let her lean over and yell in his ear. She'll find herself riding the wind.

So-long,

GENE STEWART.

Madeline thoughtfully folded the letter and murmured:

"How he must love his horse!"

"Well, I should say so," replied Alfred. "Flo will tell you. She's the only person Gene ever let ride that horse, unless, as Bill thinks, the little Mexican girl Bonita rode him out of El Cajon the other night. Well, sister mine, how about it—will you accept the horse?"

"Assuredly, and very happy indeed am I to get him. Al, you said, I think, that Mr. Stewart named him after me—saw my nickname in the New York paper?"

"Yes."

"Well, I will not change his name. But Al, how shall I ever climb up on him? He's taller than I am. What a giant of a horse! Oh, look at him—he's nosing my hand. I really believe he understood what I said. Al, did you ever see such a splendid head, and such beautiful eyes? They are so large and dark and soft—and human. Oh, I am a fickle woman, for I am forgetting White Stockings!"

"I'll gamble he'll make you forget any other horse," said Alfred. "You'll have to get on him from the porch."

As Madeline was not dressed for the saddle, she did not attempt to mount.

"Come, Majesty—how strange that sounds!—we must get acquainted. You have a new owner, a very severe young woman who will demand loyalty from you and obedience—and some day, after a decent period, she will expect love."

Madeline led the horse to and fro, and was delighted with his gentleness. She discovered that he did not need to be led. He came at her call, followed her like a pet dog, and rubbed his black muzzle against her.

Sometimes, at the turns in the walk, he lifted his head, and, with ears forward, looked up the trail by which he had come, and beyond to the foot-hills. He was looking over the range. Some one was calling to him, perhaps, from beyond the mountains. Madeline liked him the better for that memory, and pitied the wayward cowboy who had parted with his only possession for very love of it.

XI

THAT afternoon, when Alfred lifted Madeline to the back of the big roan, she felt high in the air.

"We'll have a run out to the mesa," said her brother, as he mounted. "Keep a tight rein on him, and ease up when you want him to go faster; but don't yell in his ear unless you want Florence and me to see you disappear on the horizon!"

He trotted out of the yard, down by the corrals, to come out on the edge of a gray, open flat that stretched several miles to the slope of a mesa. Florence led, and Madeline saw that she rode like a cowboy. Alfred drew on to her side, leaving Madeline in the rear.

Then the leading horses broke into a gallop. They wanted to run, and it was splendidly manifest to Madeline that she would hardly be able to keep Majesty from running, even if she wanted to. He sawed on the tight bridle as the others drew away, and broke from pace to gallop.

"This will never do. They are running away from us," said Madeline, and she eased up her hold on the bridle.

Something happened beneath her just then—she did not know, at first, exactly what. Much as she had been on horseback, she had never ridden at a running gait. In New York it was neither decorous nor safe. So when Majesty lowered and stretched, and changed the stiff, jolting gallop for a smooth, gliding run, it took

Madeline some moments to realize what was happening. She felt the steady, even rush of the wind. It amazed her to find how easily, comfortably she kept to the saddle. She found herself alive, throbbing, and inspired by she knew not what. She loosened the bridle, and leaning far forward she cried:

"Oh, you splendid fellow—run!"

She heard from under her a sudden quick, clattering roar of hoofs, and she swayed back with the wonderfully swift increase in Majesty's speed. The wind stung her face, howled in her ears, tore at her hair. The gray plain swept by on each side, and in front seemed to be waving toward her. In her blurred sight Florence and Alfred appeared to be coming back; but she saw presently, upon nearer view, that Majesty was overhauling the other horses, was going to pass them.

Indeed he did pass them, shooting by so swiftly as almost to make them appear standing still. He ran on, not breaking his gait till he reached the steep side of the mesa, where he slowed down and stopped.

"Glorious!" exclaimed Madeline.

She was all in a blaze, and every muscle and nerve of her body tingled and quivered. Her hands, as she endeavored to put up the loosened strands of hair, trembled and failed of their accustomed dexterity. Then she faced about and waited for her companions.

Alfred reached her first, laughing, delighted, yet also a little anxious.

"Can't he run? Did he bolt?"

"No, I yelled in his ear," she replied.

"So that was it! That's the woman of you—forbidden fruit. Flo said she'd do it the minute she was on him. Majesty, you can ride! See if Flo doesn't say so."

The Western girl came up then, with her pleasure bright in her face.

"It was just great to see you. How your hair burned in the wind! Al, she sure can ride. Oh! I'm so glad—I was a little afraid. And that horse! Isn't he grand?"

Alfred led the way up the steep, zigzag trail to the top of the mesa. Madeline saw a flat surface of short grass, level as a floor.

She uttered a little cry of wonder and enthusiasm.

"Al, what a place for golf! This would be the finest links in the world."

"Well, I've thought of that myself," he replied. "The trouble would be, could

anybody stop looking at the scenery long enough to hit a ball? Majesty, look!"

And then it seemed that Madeline was confronted by a spectacle too sublime and terrible for her gaze. The immensity of this red-ridged, deep-gulfed world, descending by incalculable distances, refused to be grasped. It awed her, shocked her.

"Once, Majesty, when I first came out West, I was down and out—determined to end it all," said Alfred. "I happened to climb up here looking for a lonely place to die. When I saw that—I changed my mind."

Madeline was silent. She remained so during the ride around the rim of the mesa, and down the steep trail. This time Alfred and Florence failed to tempt her into a race. She had been awestruck; she had been exalted; she had been confounded; and she recovered slowly, without divining exactly what had come to her.

She reached the ranch-house far behind her companions, and at supper-time was unusually thoughtful. Later, when they assembled on the porch to watch the sunset, Stillwell's humorous complainings inspired the inception of an idea which flashed up in her mind swift as lightning. By listening sympathetically, she encouraged him to recite the troubles of a poor cattleman. They were many and long and interesting, and rather numbing to the life of her inspired idea.

"Mr. Stillwell, could ranching here on a large scale, with up-to-date methods, be made—well, not profitable exactly, but to pay—to run without loss?" she asked, determined to kill her new-born idea at birth or else give it breath and hope of life.

"Wal, I reckon it could," he replied, with a short laugh. "It'd sure be a money-maker. Why, with all my bad luck an' poor equipment, I've lived pretty well, an' paid my debts, an' haven't really lost any money except the original outlay. I reckon thet's sunk fer good."

"Would you sell, if some one would pay your price?"

"Miss Majesty, I'd jump at the chance. Yet somehow I'd hate to leave hyar. I'd jest be fool enough to go sink the money in another ranch."

"Would Don Carlos and these other Mexicans sell?"

"They sure would. The don has been after me fer years, wantin' to sell thet old rancho of his; an' these herders in the val-

ley, with their stray cattle, they'd fall daid at sight of a little money."

"Please tell me, Mr. Stillwell, exactly what you would do here if you had unlimited means?" went on Madeline.

"Wal, Miss Majesty, it jest makes my old heart warm up to think of sich a thing. I dreamed a lot about it when I first come hyar. What would I do if I hed unlimited money? Listen. I'd buy out Don Carlos an' the greasers. I'd give a job to every good cowman in this country. I'd make them prosper as I prospered myself. I'd buy all the good horses on the ranges. I'd fence twenty thousand acres of the best grazin'. I'd drill fer water in the valley. I'd pipe water down from the mountains. I'd dam up thet draw out there. A mile-long dam from hill to hill would give me a big lake, an' hevin' an eye fer beauty, I'd plant cottonwoods around it. I'd fill thet lake full of fish. I'd put in the biggest field of alfalfa in the Southwest. I'd plant fruit-trees an' garden. I'd tear down them old corrals an' barns an' bunk-houses, to build new ones. I'd make this old rancho some comfortable an' fine. I'd put in grass an' flowers all around, an' bring young pine-trees down from the mountains. An' when all thet was done, I'd sit in my chair an' smoke an' watch the cattle stringin' in fer water an' stragglin' back into the valley. An' thet red sun out there wouldn't set on a happier man in the world than Bill Stillwell, last of the old cattlemen!"

Madeline thanked the rancher, and then rather abruptly retired to her room, where she felt no restraint to hide the force of that wonderful idea, now full-grown and tenacious and alluring.

The next day, late in the afternoon, she asked Alfred if it would be safe for her to ride out to the mesa.

"I'll go with you," he said gaily.

"Dear fellow, I want to go alone," she replied.

"Ah!" Alfred exclaimed, suddenly serious. He gave her just a quick fling of eyes, then turned away. "Go ahead! I think it's safe. I'll make it safe by sitting here with my glass and keeping an eye on you. Be careful coming down the trail. Let the horse pick his way. That's all."

She rode Majesty across the wide flat, up the zigzag trail, across the beautiful grassy level to the far rim of the mesa, and not till then did she lift her eyes to face the southwest.

Madeline looked from the gray valley at her feet to the blue Sierra Madres, gold-tipped in the setting sun. Her vision embraced in that glance distance and depth and glory hitherto unrevealed to her. The gray valley sloped and widened to the black sentinel Chiricahuas, and beyond was lost in a vast, corrugated sweep of earth, reddening down to the west, where a golden blaze lifted the dark, rugged mountains into bold relief.

The scene had infinite beauty; but after Madeline's first swift, all-embracing flash of enraptured eyes, the thought of beauty passed away. In that darkening desert there was something illimitable. Madeline saw the hollow of a stupendous hand; she felt a mighty hold upon her heart. Out of the endless space, out of silence and desolation and mystery and age, came slow-changing, colored shadows, fancies of peace, and they whispered to Madeline.

They whispered that this was a great, grim, immutable earth—that time was eternity—that life was fleeting. They whispered for her to be a woman—to love some one before it was too late—to love any one, every one—to realize the need of work, and in doing it to find happiness.

She rode back across the mesa, and down the trail, and once more upon the flat she called to the horse and made him run. His spirit seemed to race with hers. The wind of his speed blew her hair from its fastenings. When he thundered to a halt at the porch steps, Madeline, breathless and disheveled, alighted with the mass of her hair tumbling around her.

Alfred met her, and his exclamation, and Florence's rapt eyes shining on her face, and Stillwell's speechlessness, made her self-conscious. Laughing, she tried to put up her hair.

"I must—look a—fright!" she panted.

"Wal, you can say what you like," replied the old cattleman, "but I know what I think."

Madeline strove to attain calmness.

"My hat—and my combs—went on the wind. I thought my hair would go, too. There is the evening star. I am very hungry!"

And then she gave up trying to be calm, and likewise to fasten up her hair, which fell again in a golden mass.

"Mr. Stillwell," she began, and paused, strangely aware of a hurried note, a deeper ring in her voice. "Mr. Stillwell, I want

to buy your ranch—to engage you as my superintendent. I want to buy Don Carlos's ranch, and other property, to the extent, say, of fifty thousand acres. I want you to buy horses and cattle—in short, to make all those improvements which you said you had so long dreamed of. Then I have ideas of my own, in the development of which I must have your advice and Alfred's. I intend to better the condition of those poor Mexicans in the valley. I intend to make life a little more worth living for them, and for the cowboys of this range. To-morrow we shall talk it all over and plan the business details."

Madeline turned from the huge, ever-widening smile that beamed down upon her, and held out her hands to her brother.

"Alfred—strange, is it not, my coming out to you? Nay, don't smile. I hope I have found myself—my work—my happiness—here under the light of that western star!"

XII

FIVE months brought all that Stillwell had dreamed of, and so many more changes and improvements and innovations that it was as if a magic touch had transformed the old ranch. Madeline, Alfred, and Florence had talked over a fitting name and had decided on one chosen by Madeline; but in this one respect her wishes were not complied with. The cowboys named the new ranch "Her Majesty's Rancho." Stillwell said the names cowboys bestowed were felicitous, and as unchangeable as the everlasting hills; Florence went over to the enemy; and Alfred, laughing at his sister's protest, declared that the cowboys had elected her queen of the ranges, and that there was no help for it. So the name stood as Her Majesty's Rancho.

The April sun shone down upon a green knoll that nestled in the lea of the foothills, and seemed to center bright rays upon the long ranch-house, which gleamed snow-white from the level summit of the knoll. The grounds around the house bore no semblance to Eastern lawns or parks; there had been no landscape gardening; Stillwell had just brought water and grass and flowers to the knoll-top, and there had left them, as it were, to follow nature.

His idea may have been crude, but the result was beautiful. Under that hot sun, with cool water daily soaking into the rich soil, a green covering sprang into life, and

everywhere upon it, as if by magic, many-colored flowers rose in the sweet air. Lavender daisies, fragile bluebells, white four-petaled lilies, and golden poppies—deep sunset gold, the color of the West—bloomed in happy confusion. California roses, crimson as blood, nodded heavy heads and trembled with the weight of bees. Low down in bare places, isolated, open to the full power of the sun, blazed the vermilion and magenta blossoms of cactus-plants.

Green slopes led all the way down to where new adobe barns and sheds had been erected, and wide corrals stretched high-barred fences down to great squares of alfalfa, gently inclining to the gray of the valley. The bottom of a dammed-up hollow shone brightly with its slowly increasing acreage of water, upon which thousands of migratory wild-fowl whirled and splashed and squawked, as if reluctant to leave this cool surprise, so new in the long desert journey to the northland.

Quarters for the cowboys—comfortable, roomy adobe houses which not even the lamest cowboy dared designate as crampy bunks—stood in a row upon a long bench of ground above the lake. And down to the edge of the valley the cluster of Mexican habitations and the little church showed the touch of the same renewing hand.

All that had been left of the old Spanish house, which had been Stillwell's home for so long, was the bare, massive structure, and some of this had been cut away for new doors and windows. Every modern convenience, even to hot and cold running water and acetylene light, had been installed; and the whole interior painted and carpentered and furnished.

No slight task was it to oversee the many business details of Her Majesty's Rancho, and to keep a record of them. Madeline found the course of business training upon which her father had insisted to be invaluable to her now. It helped her to assimilate and arrange the practical details of cattle-raising as put forth by the blunt Stillwell.

She split up the great stock of cattle into different herds; and when any of these were out running upon the open range she had them closely watched. Part of the time each herd was kept in an enclosed range, fed and watered and carefully handled by a big force of cowboys. She employed three scouts whose duty was to ride

the ranges searching for stray, sick, or crippled cattle, or motherless calves, and to bring these in to be treated and nursed. There were two cowboys whose business was to master a pack of Russian staghounds, and to hunt down the coyotes, wolves, and lions that preyed upon the herds.

The better and tamer milch cows were separated from the ranging herds, and kept in a pasture adjoining the dairy. All branding was done in corrals, and calves were weaned from mother-cows at the proper time to benefit both. The old rough-and-ready method of branding and classing, which had so shocked Madeline, had been abandoned; and one had been inaugurated whereby cattle, cowboys, and horses were spared brutality and injury.

Madeline established an extensive vegetable farm, and planted orchards. The climate was superior to that of California, and, with abundant water, trees and plants, flourished and bloomed in a way wonderful to behold. It was with ever-increasing pleasure that Madeline walked through acres of ground once bare, now green and bright and fragrant. There were poultry-yards and pig-pens and marshy quarters for ducks and geese.

Here, in the farming section of the ranch, Madeline found employment for the little colony of Mexicans. Their lives had been as hard and barren as the dry valley where they had lived; but as the valley had been transformed by the soft, rich touch of water, so their lives had been transformed by help and sympathy and work.

Here, Madeline felt, was her home. She meant to go back to New York for a time, and to visit her old friends once or twice every year thereafter; but she shrank from making her first departure from the ranch. In New York she would have to make explanations, and they would not be understood. Her father's business had been such that he could not leave it for the time required for a Western trip; otherwise, he wrote, he would have come to take Madeline back with him. Mrs. Hammond could not have been driven to cross the Hudson River; her idea of the wilderness westward was that Indians still chased buffalo on the outskirts of Chicago.

Madeline's sister Helen professed herself eager to come out to the ranch—as much from curiosity, Madeline suspected, as from sisterly regard. She invited Helen to visit her during the summer, and bring

as many people as she liked. Madeline thought that this would be the best way to let her relatives and her Eastern friends realize and understand her determination to break old ties.

One April morning Madeline sat in her office wrestling with a problem. She had problems to solve every day. Most of these were concerned with the management of twenty-seven incomprehensible cowboys. This particular problem involved Ambrose Mills, who had eloped with her French maid, Christine.

Stillwell faced Madeline with a smile almost as huge as his bulk.

"Wal, Miss Majesty, we ketched them, but not before Padre Marcos had married them. All thet speedin' in the autoo-moobile was jest a scarin' of me to death fer nothin'. I tell you, Link Stevens is crazy about runnin' thet car. Link never hed no sense even with a hoss. If my hair hedn't been white, it'd be white now. No more rides in thet thing fer me! Wal, we ketched Ambrose an' the girl too late; but we fetched them back, an' they're out there now—spoonin', sure oblivious to their shameless conduct!"

"Stillwell, what shall I say to Ambrose? How shall I punish him? He has done wrong to deceive me. I never was so surprised in my life. Christine did not seem to care any more for Ambrose than for any of the other cowboys. What does my authority amount to? I must do something. Stillwell, you must help me."

Whenever Madeline fell into a quandary she had to call upon the old cattleman. No man ever held a position with greater pride than Stillwell, but he had been put to tests that steeped him in humility. Here he scratched his head in great perplexity.

"Dog-gone the luck! What's this elopin' bizness to do with cattle-raisin'? I don't know nothin' but cattle. Miss Majesty, it's amazin' strange what these cowboys hev come to. I don't know them any more. They dress swell an' read books, an' some of them hev actooly stopped cussin' an' drinkin'. I ain't sayin' all this is against them. Why, they're jest the finest bunch of cow-punchers I ever seen or dreamed of; but managin' them is beyond me. When cowboys begin to play thet game gol-lof an' run off with French maids, I reckon Bill Stillwell has got to resign!"

"Stillwell! Oh, you will not leave me?

What in the world should I do?" exclaimed Madeline in great anxiety.

"Wal, I sure won't leave you, Miss Majesty. No, I never'll do thet. I'll run the cattle bizness fer you, an' see after the hosses an' other stock; but I've got to hev a foreman who can handle this amazin' strange bunch of cowboys."

"You're tried half a dozen foremen. Try more, until you find the right man," said Madeline. "Never mind that now. Tell me how to impress Ambrose—to make him an example, so to speak. I must have another maid; and I do not want the next one carried off in this summary manner."

"Wal, if you fetch pretty maids out hyar you can't expect nothin' else. Why, thet black-eyed little French girl, with her white skin an' pretty airs an' smiles an' shrugs—she hed the cowboys crazy. It'll only be wuss with the next one."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Madeline.

"An' as fer impressin' Ambrose, I reckon I can tell you how to do thet. Jest give it to him good an' say you're goin' to fire him. The't'll fix Ambrose, an' mebbe scare the other boys fer a spell."

"Very well, Stillwell. Bring Ambrose in to see me, and tell Christine to wait in my room."

It was a handsome, debonair, bright-eyed cowboy that came tramping into Madeline's presence. His accustomed shyness and awkwardness had disappeared. He looked straight into Madeline's face as if he expected her to wish him joy; and Madeline actually found that expression trembling to her lips. She held it back, and tried to be severe; but she feared that she would fail. Something warm and sweet, like a fragrance, had entered the room with Ambrose.

"Ambrose, what have you done?" she asked.

"Miss Hammond, I've been and gone and got married," replied Ambrose, his words tumbling over one another. His eyes snapped, and there was a kind of glow upon his clean-shaven brown cheek. "I've stole a march on the other boys. There was Frank Slade pushin' me close, and I was hevin' some runnin' to keep Jim Bell back in my dust."

"Even old man Nels made eyes at Christine; so I wasn't goin' to take any chances. I just packed her off to El Cajon and married her."

"Oh! So I heard," said Madeline slow-

ly, as she watched him. "Ambrose, do you—love her?"

He reddened under her clear gaze, dropped his head, and fumbled with his new sombrero, and there was a catch in his breath. Madeline saw his powerful brown hand tremble. It affected her strangely that this stalwart cowboy, who could rope and throw and tie a wild steer in less than one minute, should tremble at a mere question. Suddenly he raised his head, and at the beautiful blaze of his eyes Madeline turned her own away.

"Yes, Miss Hammond, I love her," he said. "I think I love her in the way you're askin' about. I know the first time I saw her I thought how wonderful it'd be to have a girl like that for my wife. It's all been so strange—her comin', an' how she made me feel. My—it—well, I guess I have a little understandin' now of Padre Marcos's blessin'."

"Ambrose, have you anything else to say to me?" asked Madeline.

"I'm sure sorry I didn't have time to tell you; but I was in some hurry."

"What did you intend to do? Where were you going—when Stillwell found you?"

"We'd just been married. I hadn't thought of anything after that. Suppose I'd have rustled back to my job. I'll sure have to work now, and save my money."

"Well, Ambrose, I am glad you realize your responsibilities. Do you earn enough—is your pay sufficient to keep a wife?"

"Sure it is! Why, Miss Hammond, I never before earned half the salary I'm gettin' now. It's some fine to work for you. I'm goin' to fire the boys out of my bunk-house and fix it up for Christine and me. Say, won't they be jealous?"

"Ambrose, I—I congratulate you—I wish you joy," said Madeline. "I shall make Christine a little wedding-present. I want to talk to her for a few moments. You may go now."

It would have been impossible for Madeline to say one severe word to that happy cowboy. She called to Christine.

"Mrs. Ambrose Mills, please come in!"

No sound came from the other room.

"I should like very much to see the bride," went on Madeline.

Still there was no stir or reply.

"Christine!" called Madeline.

Then it was as if a little whirlwind of flying feet and entreating hands and be-

seching eyes blew in upon Madeline. Christine was small, graceful, plump, with very white skin and very dark hair. She had been Madeline's favorite maid for years, and there was sincere affection between the two. Whatever had been the blissful ignorance of Ambrose, it was manifestly certain that Christine knew how she had transgressed. Her fear and remorse and appeal for forgiveness were poured out in an incoherent storm.

Plain it was that the little French maid had been overwhelmed. It was only after Madeline had taken the emotional girl in her arms, and had forgiven and soothed her, that her part in the elopement became clear. Christine was in a maze; but gradually, as she saw that she was forgiven, calmness came in some degree and with it a story which amused yet shocked Madeline. If ever a cave-man had taken unto himself a wife, if ever a barbarian had carried off a Sabine woman, then Ambrose Mills had acted with the violence of such ancient forebears.

"He say he love me," repeated the girl, in a kind of rapt awe. "He ask me to marry him—he kees me—he hug me—he lift me on ze horse—he ride with me all night—he marry me!"

And she exhibited a ring on the third finger of her left hand. Madeline saw that whatever had been the state of Christine's feeling for Ambrose before this marriage, she loved him now. She had been taken forcibly, but she was won.

After Christine had gone, comforted and betraying her shy eagerness to get back to Ambrose, Madeline was haunted by the look in the girl's eyes, and by her words. Assuredly the spell of romance was on this sunny land!

XIII

STILLWELL'S interest in the revolution across the Mexican line had manifestly increased with the news that Gene Stewart had achieved distinction with the rebel forces. Thereafter the old cattleman sent for El Paso and Douglas newspapers, wrote to ranchmen he knew on the big bend of the Rio Grande, and would talk indefinitely to any one who would listen to him. There was no possibility of Stillwell's friends at the ranch forgetting his favorite cowboy, though he always prefaced his eulogy with an apologetic statement that Stewart had gone to the bad.

Madeline liked to listen to him, though she was not always sure how much of the news was authentic. There appeared to be no doubt, however, that the cowboy had performed some daring feats. Madeline found his name mentioned in several of the border newspapers. When the rebels under Madero captured the city of Juarez, Stewart did fighting that won him the name of El Capitan. This battle apparently ended the revolution. The capitulation of President Diaz followed, and there was a feeling of relief among ranchers on the border.

Nothing more was heard of Gene Stewart until April, when a report reached Stillwell that the cowboy had arrived in El Cajon, evidently hunting trouble. The old cattleman saddled a horse and started post-haste for town. In two days he returned, depressed in spirit. Madeline happened to be present when he told Alfred what he had learned.

"I got there too late, Al," said the cattleman. "Gene was gone. An' what do you think of this? Danny Mains hed jest left with a couple of burros packed. I couldn't find what way he went, but I'm bettin' he hit the Peloncillo trail."

"Danny will show up some day," replied Alfred. "What did you learn about Stewart? Maybe he left with Danny."

"Not much," said Stillwell shortly. "Gene's off again. None of these mountains fer him."

"Well, tell us about him."

Stillwell wiped his sweaty brow and squared himself to talk.

"Wal, it's sure amazin' strange about Gene. It's got me locoed. He came to El Cajon a week or so ago. He was trained down like as if he'd been ridin' the range all winter. He hed plenty of money—Mex, they said. All the greasers was crazy about him, an' called him El Capitan. He got drunk an' went roarin' round fer Pat Hawe. You remember that greaser who was plugged last October—the night Miss Majesty arrived? Wal, he's daid, an' people says that Pat is a goin' to lay that killin' onto Gene. I reckon that's jest talk, though Pat is mean enough to do it, if he hed the nerve. Anyway, if he was in El Cajon, he kept mighty much to himself. Gene walked up an' down, up an' down, all day an' night, lookin' fer Pat; but he didn't find him. An' of course he kept gettin' drunker. He made lots of trouble, but there wasn't no gun-play. Mebbe that

made him sore, so he went an' licked Flo's brother-in-law. That wasn't so bad. Jack sure needed a good lickin'. Wal, then Gene met Danny an' tried to get Danny drunk; but he couldn't! What do you think of that? Danny wouldn't touch a drop. I'm sure glad of that, but it's amazin' strange. Why, Danny was a fish fer red liquor. I guess he an' Gene had some pretty hard words, though I'm not sure about that. Anyway, Gene went down to the railroad, got on an engine, an' was in the engine when it pulled out. I hope he doesn't hold up the train. If he gets gay over in Arizona, he'll go to the pen at Yuma, an' that pen is a graveyard fer cowboys. I wired to agents along the railroad to look out fer him an' to wire back to me if he's located."

"Suppose you do find him, Stillwell—what can you do?" inquired Alfred.

The old man nodded gloomily.

"I straightened him up once; mebbe I can do it again." Then, brightening somewhat, he turned to Madeline. "I jest hed an idea, Miss Majesty. If I can get him, Gene Stewart is the cowboy I want fer ray foreman. He can manage this bunch of cow-punchers that are drivin' me dotty: an' since he's fought fer the rebels, an' got that name El Capitan, all the greasers in the country will kneel to him. Now, Miss Majesty, we hev'n't got rid of Don Carlos an' his vaqueros yet. To be sure, he sold you his house an' ranch an' stock; but you remember nothin' was put in black an' white about when he should get out, an' he ain't gettin' out. I don't like the looks of things a little bit. I'll tell you now that Don Carlos knows somethin' about the cattle I lost an' that you've been losin' right along. That greaser is hand an' glove with the rebels. I'm willin' to gamble that when he does get out, he an' his vaqueros will make another one of the bands of guerrillas that are harassin' the border. Wal, I need Gene Stewart. I need him bad. Will you let me hire him, Miss Majesty, if I can get him straightened up?" The old cattleman ended huskily.

"Stillwell, by all means find Stewart, and do not wait to straighten him up. Bring him to the ranch," replied Madeline.

Thanking her, Stillwell led his horse away.

"Strange how he loves that cowboy!" murmured Madeline.

"Not so strange, Majesty," replied her brother; "not when you know. Stewart

has been with Stillwell on some hard trips into the desert alone. There's no middle course of feeling between men facing death in the desert. Either they hate each other or love each other. I don't know, but I imagine Stewart did something for Stillwell—saved his life, perhaps. Besides, Stewart's a likable chap when he's going straight. I hope Stillwell brings him back. It's true that we are worried about Don Carlos. Some of his vaqueros came into my yard the other day when I had left Flo alone. She had a bad scare. The vaqueros have been different since Don Carlos sold the ranch. I never would have trusted a white woman alone with them; but they are bolder now. They've got assurance. They know they can ride off any night and cross the border."

During the succeeding week Madeline discovered that a good deal of her sympathy for Stillwell in his hunt for the reckless Stewart had insensibly grown to be sympathy for the cowboy. It was rather a paradox, she thought, that opposed to the continual reports of Stewart's wildness as he caroused from town to town were the continual expressions of good-will and faith and hope universally given out by those near her at the ranch. Stillwell loved the cowboy; Florence was fond of him; Alfred liked, admired, and pitied him; the cowboys swore their regard for him the more he disgraced himself.

Stillwell was so earnest and zealous in his search that one not familiar with the situation would have believed he was trying to find and reclaim his own son. He made several trips to little stations in the valley, from which he returned with a gloomy face. Madeline got the details from Alfred. Stewart was going from bad to worse—drunk—disorderly—savage—sure to land in the penitentiary.

Then came a report that hurried Stillwell off to Rodeo. He returned on the third day, a crushed man. He had been so bitterly hurt that no one, not even Madeline, could get out of him what had happened. He admitted finding Stewart and failing to influence him; but when the old cattleman got so far he turned purple in the face and talked to himself, as if dazed.

"But Gene was drunk. He was *drunk*, or he couldn't hev treated old Bill like thet!"

Madeline was stirred with an anger toward the cowboy that was as strong as

her sorrow for the loyal old cattleman; and yet, when Stillwell gave up, she resolved to take a hand herself. She sent Nels, mounted upon his own horse, and leading Majesty, to Rodeo in search of Stewart, with instructions to bring him back to the ranch. In due time Nels returned, leading the roan without a rider.

"Yep, I shore found him," replied Nels, when questioned. "Found him half sobered up. He'd been in a scrap, an' somebody hed put him to sleep, I guess. Wal, when he seen thet roan hoss he let out a yell an' grabbed him all round the neck. The hoss knowed him, all right. Gene hugged the hoss an' cried—cried like— I never seen no one who cried like he did. I waited a while, an' was jest goin' to say somethin' to him, when he turned on me red-eyed—mad as fire.

"'Nels,' he said, 'I cared a lot fer thet hoss, an' I liked you pretty well, but if you don't take him away I'll shoot you both!'

"Wal, I lit out. I didn't even git to say howdy to him."

"Nels, you think it useless to try to persuade him?" asked Madeline.

"I shore do, Miss Hammond," replied Nels gravely. "I've seen a few sun-blinded an' locoed an' snake-poisoned an' skunk-bitten cow-punchers in my day; but Gene Stewart beats 'em all. He's shore runnin' wild fer the divide!"

Madeline dismissed Nels, but before he got out of ear-shot she heard him speak to Stillwell, who awaited him on the porch.

"Bill, put this in your pipe an' smoke it—none of them scraps Gene has hed was over a woman. It used to be thet when he was drunk he'd scrap over every pretty greaser girl he'd run across. Thet's why Pat Hawe thinks Gene plugged the strange vaquero who was with little Bonita thet night last fall. Wal, Gene's scrappin' now jest to git shot up hisself, for some reason thet only God Almighty knows."

Nels's story of how Stewart wept over his horse influenced Madeline powerfully. Her next move was to persuade Alfred to see if he could not do better with this doggedly bent cowboy. Alfred needed only a word of persuasion, for he had already considered going to Rodeo. He went—and returned alone.

"Majesty, I can't explain Stewart's actions," said Alfred. "I saw him, I talked with him, and he knew me, but nothing I said appeared to get to him. He

has changed terribly. It actually hurt me to look at him. I couldn't have fetched him back here—not as he is now. I heard all about him, and if he isn't out of his mind he's determined to get himself killed. Some of his escapades are—are terrible, and not for your ears. Bill did all any man could do for another. We've all done our best for Stewart. If you had had a chance, perhaps you could have saved him; but it's too late now."

XIV

DAYS passed, and each one brought additional gossip of Stewart's headlong career toward the Yuma penitentiary. He had crossed the line into Cochise County, Arizona, where sheriffs kept a stricter observance of law. Finally a letter came from a friend of Nels's in Chiricahua, saying that Stewart had been hurt in a brawl there. His hurt was not serious, but it would probably keep him quiet long enough to get sober, and the opportunity, Nels's informant said, would be a good one for Stewart's friends to take him home.

This epistle enclosed a letter to Stewart from his sister, which had been found upon him. It told a story of illness and destitution, and made an appeal for aid. Nels's friend said that he forwarded it without Gene's knowledge, thinking Stillwell might care to help the errant cowboy's family. Stewart had no money, he said.

The sister's letter found its way to Madeline. She read it, tears in her eyes. It told her much more than its brief story of illness and poverty, and of wonder why Gene had not written home for so long. It told of motherly love, sisterly love, brotherly love—dear family ties that had not been broken. It spoke of pride in this El Capitan brother who had become famous. It was signed "your loving sister Letty."

Not improbably, Madeline thought, this letter was one reason for Stewart's headstrong and long-continued abasement. It had been received too late—after he had squandered the money that would have meant so much to mother and sister. Be that as it might, Madeline immediately sent a bank-draft to Stewart's sister, with a letter explaining that the money was drawn in advance on Stewart's salary. This done, she impulsively determined to go to Chiricahua herself.

The horseback rides Madeline had taken to the little Arizona hamlet had tried her

endurance to the utmost, but the journey by automobile, except for some rocky bits of road and sandy stretches, was comfortable, and a matter of only a few hours. The big touring-car was still a kind of seventh wonder to the Mexicans and cowboys; not that automobiles were very new and strange, but because this one was such an enormous machine and capable of greater speed than an express train.

The chauffeur who had arrived with the car found his situation among the jealous cowboys far removed from a bed of roses. He had been induced to remain long enough to teach the management of the machine; and choice fell upon Link Stevens as his successor, for the simple reason that of all the cowboys he was the only one with any knack for mechanics. Now, Link had been a hard-riding, hard-driving cowboy, and that winter he had sustained an injury to his leg, caused by a bad fall, and was unable to sit his horse. This had been gall and wormwood to him; but when the big white automobile came, and he was elected to drive it, life was once more worth living.

All the other cowboys regarded Link and his machine as some correlated species of demon. They were deathly afraid of both. For this reason Nels, when Madeline asked him to accompany her to Chiricahua, replied reluctantly that he would rather follow on his horse. However, she prevailed over his hesitancy, and with Florence also in the car, they set out.

For miles and miles the valley road was smooth, hard-packed, and slightly down hill; and when speeding was perfectly safe Madeline was not averse to it. The grassy plain sailed backward in gray sheets, and the little dot in the valley grew larger and larger. From time to time Link glanced round at Nels, whose eyes were wild and whose hands clutched his seat.

While the car was crossing the sandy and rocky places, going slowly, Nels appeared to breathe easier; and when it stopped in the wide, dusty street of Chiricahua, he gladly tumbled out.

"Nels, we shall wait here in the car while you find Stewart," said Madeline.

"Miss Hammond, I reckon Gene'll run when he sees us—if he's able to run," replied Nels. "Wal, I'll go find him an' make up my mind what we'd better do."

Nels crossed the railroad track and disappeared behind the low, flat houses. After a little time he reappeared and hurried up

to the car. Madeline felt his gray gaze searching her face.

"Miss Hammond, I found him," said Nels. "He was sleepin'. He's sober an' not bad hurt; but I don't believe you ought to see him. Mebbe Florence—"

"Nels, I want to see him myself. Why not? What did he say when you told him I was here?"

"Shore, I didn't tell him thet. I jest says 'Hullo, Gene!' an' he says, 'Wal, Nels, mebbe I ain't glad to see a human bein'.' He asked me who was with me, an' I told him Link an' some friends. I said I'd fetch them in. Now, if you really will see him, Miss Hammond, it's a good chance; but shore it's a touchy matter, an' you'll be some sick at sight of him. He's layin' in a greaser hole over here."

Madeline did not hesitate a moment.

"Thank you, Nels. Take me at once. Come, Florence!"

They left the car, now surrounded by gaping-eyed Mexican children, and crossed the dusty space to a narrow lane between red adobe walls. Passing by several houses, Nels stopped at the door of what appeared to be an alleyway, leading back. It was filthy.

"He's in there, around thet first corner, in the *patio*. Miss Hammond, if you don't mind, I'll wait here for you. I reckon Gene wouldn't like any fellers around when he sees you girls."

Madeline hesitated, and went forward slowly. She had given no thought at all to what Stewart might feel when suddenly surprised by her presence.

"Florence, you wait also," said Madeline at the doorway, and turned in alone.

She stepped into a broken-down *patio*, littered with alfalfa straw and debris, all clear in the sunlight. Upon a bench, his back toward her, sat a man looking out through the rents in the broken wall. He had not heard her.

She saw that the place had been used as a corral. A rat ran boldly across the dirt floor. The air swarmed with flies, at which the man brushed with weary hand. Madeline did not recognize Stewart. The side of his face exposed to her gaze was black, bruised, bearded. His clothes were ragged and soiled. There were bits of alfalfa in his hair. His shoulders sagged. He made a wretched and hopeless figure, sitting there. Madeline divined something of why Nels shrank from being present.

"Mr. Stewart! It is I—Miss Hammond—come to see you," she said.

He grew perfectly motionless, as if he had been changed to stone.

She repeated her greeting. His body jerked. He moved violently, as if instinctively to turn and face this intruder, but a more violent movement checked him.

Madeline waited. How singular that this ruined cowboy had pride that kept him from showing his face! Or, was it not shame more than pride?

"Mr. Stewart, I have come to—talk with you, if you will let me."

"Go away," he muttered.

"Mr. Stewart!" she began with involuntary hauteur; but instantly she corrected herself, and became deliberate and cool, for she saw that otherwise he might not even hear her. "I have come to help you. Will you not let me?"

"For Heaven's sake! You—you!" He choked over the words. "Go away!"

"Stewart, perhaps it was for Heaven's sake that I came," said Madeline. "Surely it was for yours, and your sister's—"

Madeline bit her tongue, for she had not meant to betray her knowledge of Letty. He groaned, and, staggering up to the broken wall, leaned there with his face hidden. Madeline reflected that perhaps the slip of speech had been well.

"Stewart, please let me say what I have to say."

He was silent. She gathered courage and inspiration.

"Stillwell is deeply hurt, deeply grieved that he could not turn you back from this—this fatal course. My brother is also. They wanted to help you; and so do I. I have come, thinking somehow I might succeed where they failed. Nels brought your sister's letter. I—I read it. I was only the more determined to try to help you, and indirectly to help your mother and Letty. Stewart, we want you to come to the ranch. Stillwell needs you for his foreman. The position is open to you, and you can name your salary. Both Al and Stillwell are anxious about Don Carlos, the *vaqueros*, and the raids down along the border. My cowboys are without a capable leader. Will you come?"

"No!" he answered.

"But Stillwell wants you so badly."

"No!"

"Stewart—I want you to come."

"No!"

His replies had been hoarse, loud, furious. They disconcerted Madeline, and she paused, trying to think of a way to proceed. Stewart staggered away from the wall, and falling upon the bench, he hid his face in his hands. All his motions, like his speech, had been violent.

"Will you please go away?" he asked.

"Stewart, certainly I cannot remain here longer if you insist upon my going. But why not listen to me when I want so much to help you? Why?"

"I'm an infernal blackguard!" he burst out. "But I'm not so low—that I can stand for a—*a lady like you—seeing me here.*"

"When I made up my mind to help you, I made it up to see you wherever you were. Stewart, come away; come back with us to the ranch. You are in a bad condition now. Everything looks black to you; but that will pass. When you are among friends again you will get well. You will be your old self. Why, Stewart, think how young you are! It is a shame to waste your life. Come back with me."

"Miss Hammond, this was my last plunge. I'm done for now," he replied despondently. "It's too late."

"Oh, no; it is not so bad as all that."

"It's too late."

"At least make an effort, Stewart. Try!"

"No. There's no use. I'm done for. Please leave—me—thank you—for—"

He had been savage, then sullen, and now he was grim. Madeline all but lost power to resist his deadly finality. No doubt he knew he was doomed. Yet something halted her—held her even as she took a backward step.

She became conscious of a subtle change of her own feeling. She had come into that squalid hole Madeline Hammond, earnest enough, kind enough in her intentions, but she had been almost imperious—a woman habitually, proudly used to being obeyed. She divined that all the pride, blue blood, wealth, culture, distinction, all the condescending persuasion, the fatuous philanthropy on earth would not avail to turn this man a single hair's breadth from his downward career to destruction. Her coming had terribly augmented his bitter hate of himself. She was going to fail to help him! She experienced a sensation of impotence that amounted almost to distress; and all at once she became merely a woman, brave and sweet and indomitable.

"Stewart, look at me," she said.

He shuddered. She advanced and laid a hand on his bent shoulder. Under the light touch he appeared to sink.

"Look at me," she repeated.

But he could not lift his head. He was abject, crushed. He dared not show his swollen, blackened face. His sullen, cramped posture revealed more than his features might have shown; it betrayed the torturing shame of a man of violent pride and passion, a man who had been confronted in his degradation by the woman he had dared to enshrine in his heart. It betrayed his love.

"Listen, then," went on Madeline, and her voice was unsteady. "Listen to me, Stewart. The greatest men are those who have fallen deepest into the mire, sinned most, suffered most, and then have fought their evil natures and conquered. I think you can shake off this desperate mood and be a man."

"I'm only a dog!" he cried.

"Listen to me again. Somehow I know you're worthy of Stillwell's love. Will you come back with us—for his sake?"

"No! It's too late, I tell you."

"Stewart, the best thing in life is faith in human nature. I have faith in you. I believe you are worth it."

"You're only kind and good, saying that. You can't mean it."

"I mean it with all my heart," she replied, a sudden rich warmth suffusing her body as she saw the first sign of his softening. "Will you come back? If not for your own sake or Stillwell's—then for mine?"

"What am I to such a woman as you?"

"A man in trouble. I have come to help you—to show my faith in you."

"If I believed that I might try," he said.

"Listen," she began softly, hurriedly. "My word is not lightly given. Let it be my pledge of faith in you. Look at me now—and say you will come."

He heaved up his big frame, as if trying to cast off a giant's burden, and then slowly he turned toward her. His face was a blotched and terrible thing. It was hideous. At that instant all that appeared human to Madeline was the dawning in dead, furnacelike eyes of a beautiful light.

"I'll come," he whispered huskily.

"Give me a few days to straighten up—then I'll come!"

(To be continued)



THOMIAS DROVE HIS CANOE UPON THE SLENDER STRAND OF THE ISLAND

WHY TIM MULCAHEY CAME HOME

BY JOHN FLEMING WILSON

AUTHOR OF "THE PRINCESS OF SORRY VALLEY," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY GEORGE GIBBS

IT began with a harsh word roared through the blackness of a moonless night by King Desmond Mulcahey, of the isle of Ulua. It ended six years later in the fire-room of the Metaplan on a blowy night off the Gulf of San Juan del Sur. And between the midnight curse put upon his son by Desmond Mulcahey and that last hour on the heaving plates of the Metaplan, we have an episode in the career of the Rev. R. Thomas, representative in the south Pacific of the Salem, Pennsylvania, Mission Union.

Desmond Mulcahey was a black northerner of an Irishman—mingled of fiery Norman blood and heavy Scots. He was a lustful man with a conscience, and when Margaret, his wife, died, he stared at his son and swore he would make a good man

of him. Ten years later Timothy had broken the ten commandments under his heel and received the curse. Not knowing that his father had not slept across the twelve-hour in that ten years, he took the hoarse words at their face value and vanished from the isle of Ulua.

Within six months the Rev. R. Thomas drove his canoe upon the slender strand of the island, stretched his thin legs across the grass, and entered Desmond Mulcahey's bungalow. The big Irishman greeted him with a scowl.

"Am I never to be at peace?" he demanded.

Thomas rubbed his single eye carefully with the corner of his handkerchief.

"Where is Tim?" he inquired.

"Ha!" sneered Desmond, the hair on

lis black fists bristling. "Timothy has gone. He was the child of sin, and he has returned to the pit."

The missionary sat him down, folding his rusty coat-tails under him.

"His mother was a good woman," he said mildly.

The King of Ulua bent forward truculently.

"She was a saint! No man except myself ever felt the softness of her hand or saw the light of her eyes. But the boy was born in sin," Mulcahey groaned. "I loved his mother without due reverence. 'Tis the wages of wickedness I'm getting."

"He has gone?" Thomias repeated quietly.

"He came home one night after wasting the time with glasses and the dice," the old man returned. "I cursed him, and he was gone in the morning. Leave me alone. I need none of your words."

Thomias turned and stared out at the blue and sparkling sea. Far on the horizon a single cloud sailed majestically into infinity. It was a spacious day, and he felt the enormous and bewitching power of the sky. He bent his eye on the miserable man before him.

"He went away!" he said gently.

"Was he driven, or was he called?"

"You mean—" said Desmond Mulcahey quickly.

Thomias waved his slender hand toward the firmament.

"Maybe it was the curse you put upon him in the darkness," he responded. "And again he may have listened to the wind and—gone."

"I feel the guilt heavy on my heart," said Desmond.

"He is young," said the missionary. "I—I think he heard the wind—and went."

They looked on the shimmering sea and were silent. Finally Mulcahey cleared his throat.

"It may be so. I felt guilty. After all, he had a good mother."

"Did she—"

Thomias's voice fell. The old man bent dark brows on him.

"She sat and breathed the air o' mornings," he returned. "She was always homesick for the open. Maybe it's the same spirit in the boy. The lungs of him crave the big winds of the world. His mother never said anything, but I have seen

her many a time rise up on her elbow at night and stare into the moon with tears on her lashes. D'ye think it might be that Timothy—"

Thomias bowed his head.

"I have never seen a woman's cheek in the night," he said softly; "but I tell you this, Desmond Mulcahey—a woman's son never entirely loses the beat of her heart. If his mother looked out into the night sky and cried on the pillow, it is true that he must have waked from his sleep and seen the stars his mother watched. We must call him back. He is gone, but he will come back."

The old man met the missionary's eyes understandingly.

"I will do so," he whispered. "After all, it is my fault. It's the blood of his father, the black blood of myself, that keeps him away."

"Let us call him," said Thomias with utter simplicity, and knelt on the step.

It was a strange prayer that went up into the dusky and starlit sky above the island of Ulua:

"Timothy, you are called by the father who loves you, and by the spirit of your mother who held you close before she died. Come back, for it is misery to be a stranger, and hell is loneliness. Come back, that you may see the eyes of your father and hear the whisper at midnight in the room where your mother died."

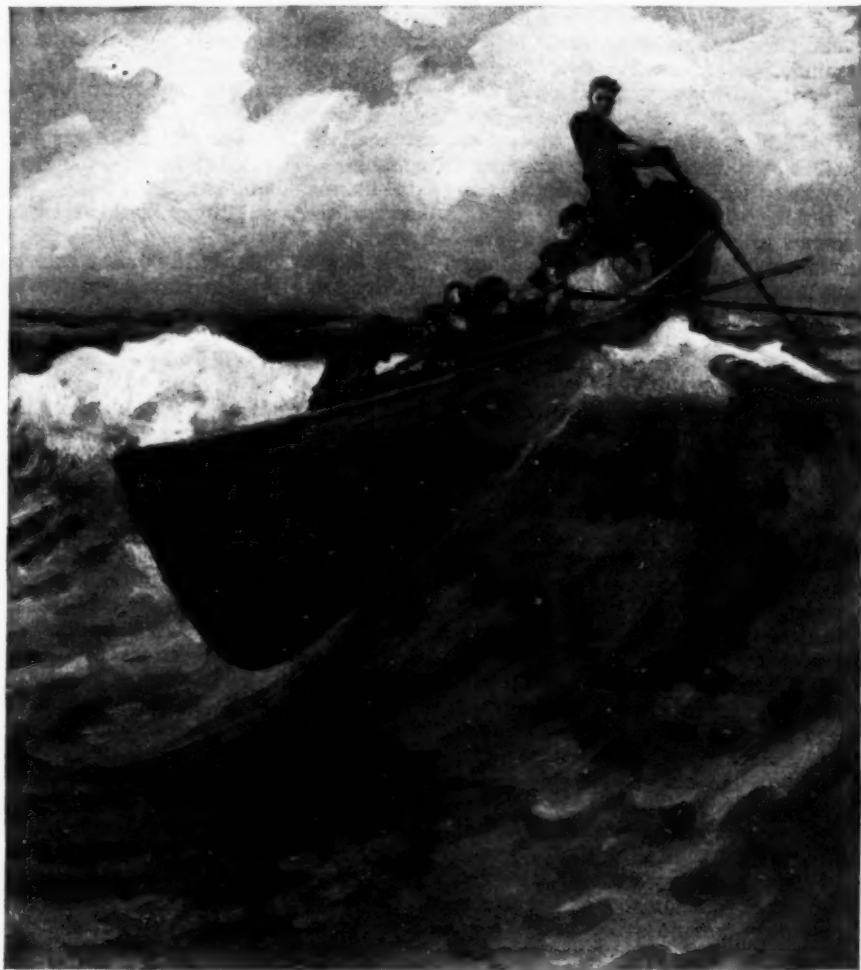
The missionary's voice was still. Desmond Mulcahey sobbed once; and then through the lit silence of the night went his single cry:

"Timothy!"

II

THE old Metaplan was on her fifty-seventh voyage between San Francisco and Auckland *via* Guatemala. Away deep in her stokehold Timothy Mulcahey handled his slice-bar with the sure and adept strength that marks the trained fireman. Usually the roaring fire spoke its sibilant language direct into his listening ear; but there was no message from the glowing coals this night, either of sulfur and clinker, or of hissing gas that whitens the furnace walls.

Timothy did not know what had happened. The hot and teeming hold was alien. His thoughts were far away, wandering through darkness—homeless and unguided. Now and again he heaved his great



THE BOAT SWEEPED DOWN THE DECLIVITY OF THE BREAKER

shoulders and shook himself, as if to rid him by physical effort of a mental incubus. It was in vain.

The third engineer dipped under the boiler's head and stood beside him.

"We're getting little steam for much coal to-night," he growled.

Timothy shrugged his white shoulders under the grimy singlet.

"The fires are hot," he returned, "and the grates are clean; but there is no life in the steam, sir. I think—"

"Ye are not paid to think," was the surly response.

Mulcahey flung open the door. Both stared in at the flame. And then something happened. The great glowing bed of coals crumpled and broke like glass. The third engineer slipped backward, while Timothy hung poised on tiptoe. The Metaplan had finished her last voyage.

The water-gages throbbed and pumped furiously. Then the steamer slowly lurched over to starboard and lay there, wounded and trembling.

"It's a wonder those boiler-stays held!" muttered the third engineer fatuously. "We struck something."

Mulcahey stared down at the foaming stream of water that surged up out of the bilges and effervesced on the plates.

"I dunno," he returned dully. "Anyway, she's ripped wide open."

Twenty minutes later the passengers were huddled on the boat-deck, while the crew toiled over the lashings of the boats. Timothy stood by, breathing in deeply the warm, rushing wind.

It seemed to him that he was in a mysterious dream. The hazy stars above, the bawling men about him, the dim horizon, the dark billows heaving from the invisible to lift and drop the sinking ship, appeared as a part of some tremendous and inexplicable phenomenon, like an interminable and detached portion of an existence without beginning or end.

He saw boat after boat slip away down the ship's side. He heard the quick cries of strange people—folk whom he had never seen nor heard before. Then he found himself almost alone, breathing deeply as if for a plunge into the depths. A man close to him bawled:

"We must get that last boat over before she goes down!"

He clambered into the swinging craft and mechanically dragged his weight on the falls. The ropes creaked through the blocks. A heaving sea caught the boat, sucked it away from the tilted side of the Metaplan, and spun it helplessly into the darkness. Timothy took an oar and pulled doggedly on it.

He did not know when the Metaplan vanished; but gradually he roused to the fact that there was no sailor in his boat. No one was steering. His companions were all half-clad, wholly dazed stokers. They pulled raggedly on the oars, and the little craft's progress was small.

Where were the others? He scanned the sea in vain for a glimpse of any of the other boats. Evidently they had set a course along the wind, while the one he was in had been blown pilotless far in the other direction.

Always a boatman, and trained from his youth to the handling of small craft under all conditions of wind and sea, Mulcahey now assumed command of his few companions. He had no notion of the approximate position of the old Metaplan when she struck the derelict, and he could only vaguely orient himself by the unfamiliar stars of that southern ocean. But he steered steadily

on one course. He could not have told how he determined this; in the dark and mysterious night he merely obeyed an overpowering instinct.

When the sun rose he found he was headed due south. To the hoarse queries of the others he answered that he was seeking land. Because of his self-confidence they listened and submitted, though they discussed the possibility of finding the other boats.

But they were doomed to disappointment. The long day brought no sight of the rest of the complement of the Metaplan. That night Mulcahey boldly altered his course to the westward.

Other days and other nights passed, and the little boat still crept slowly over glassy seas toward its unseen goal. The food, such as it was, was sufficient for several weeks. The water-casks were full. Mulcahey's companions pulled stolidly at the oars or drowsed across the thwarts in infinite, silent patience. The course of time had lost interest for them. The eternal and astounding phenomena of their daily salvation left them unexcited. They stared with dull eyes at the one man of them all who held a purpose.

Slowly, day by day, Mulcahey conned his wretched craft onward. Gradually he became obsessed with the desire to steer westward without losing a mile to either side of his self-appointed course. He distrusted the various men whom he was compelled to leave in charge for an hour now and then. He would sit and glower on them, cursing them heartily if he detected the slightest deviation from the direction he had set.

He could not define his intense but vague desire. At times he had to gulp down a sob because of sheer yearning; again, his lip trembled. Was it physical fear? Was it weakness? He could not tell. All that he knew was that he must keep his steady course for some unknown, unnamed, strange port.

Ten days after the wreck of the Metaplan he sat in the stern-sheets, dozing in the heat of the sun. He had just beaten and cowed his crew, suddenly mutinous and wild. The leader of the outbreak lay in the boat's bottom, rubbing a feeble hand slowly over his battered face. The others pulled sullenly at the oars, downcast of eye, pouting like children.

The effort had sucked away Timothy Mulcahey's strength, and he wavered be-

tween the unconsciousness of sleep and the bright sensitiveness of fever. He saw the face of his father, the shining strand of Ulua, the breaker curling in a pellucid arc over the reef. He steered due west.

III

ON a morning the Rev. R. Thomas rose from his mat and went down to bathe in the lagoon. His ablutions finished, he strode back and forth in the crinkling sand and prayed, as was his custom, with intensity and fervor. But his petition was framed in curt sentences, hardily uttered, with the reverence of a man accustomed to strike his meaning home:

"The old man has prayed for his son's return. I know that his prayer will be answered; but he is dying because of sorrow, and unless this—our petition—be granted, O Lord, he will trust neither my preaching nor Thy sure mercies. Thou knowest, Lord, that the old man wakes at night. Grant him this, that he may sleep as those full of years should sleep—like Thy little children, free from care and leaving all to Thee."

His voice died, and with bowed head Thomas waited for the answer. How often had he waited! Yet his faith had never died within him. He lifted his head at last.

"I must pray for yet another day," he muttered.

But far out beyond the tossing breakers that shone in the narrow pass leading into the lagoon he saw a boat, swung high on an incoming comber. He discerned the bowed, black figures on the thwarts, and tall above them a single dominant form, holding the loom of a steering-oar in his hand.

The vision sank and vanished. It rose again in the full foam of the surge, and the missionary knew that his prayer was answered.

He saw the steersman toss an arm upward. The bent figures suddenly took life and rowed desperately. The boat swept down the declivity of the breaker, rocked wildly in the broken water, and then, lifted by a second incoming wave, swept into the lagoon.

The sailors became lifeless again. Borne on the tide the boat floated inward.

"Timothy!" called a husky voice by the preacher's side.

But the old man's son made no response. He stood motionless and deaf at his steer-

ing-oar. He seemed utterly oblivious to everything.

As he came closer, the two men on the shore could see that his eyes were set and unseeing. His lean face was contorted, as if he listened with the ears of his soul for some yet unheard call; but he held the small craft to her course, blindly following an invisible guide.

Slowly the boat neared the beach. The oars dragged in the shimmering water. Thomas stepped deeply into the lagoon, caught the prow, and turned it gently to the shore. It nosed softly into the sand and stopped.

Timothy Mulcahey still stared out sightlessly; his crew still sat slouched down on the thwarts. The empty water-cask rolled with hollow sound on the bottom gratings. The flat biscuit-sacks seeped up the stale bilge-water.

"They are dead!" groaned Desmond Mulcahey.

Thomas drew the boat a little nearer and gently touched the immobile steersman on the arm.

"Timothy Mulcahey," he said gently, "you are home!"

The young man moved his parched lips, let the oar's loom rise from his grasp, and sat down. His eyes closed.

To Desmond Mulcahey's hoarse bellow natives streamed down. They picked up the unconscious men and bore them across the grass to the big house.

"Will he live?" said the old man to the missionary, bending over his son.

"He will live the life everlasting, Desmond Mulcahey," responded Thomas.

Desmond bowed his grizzled head.

"It is better," he whispered, "that he should go back to his mother."

And above the silent dead rose the missionary's calm tones.

"God of mothers! Receive these, who are come home. They have traversed many seas and watched many stars, O Lord, in order to return to Thee and to their mothers."

Desmond's cracked voice broke the silence that followed.

"We will take him to his mother." He met the stern compassion in the solitary eye of the Rev. R. Thomas. "She gave him to me. It is right that I should give him back. But—"

He put a gnarled and trembling hand over his quivering lips.

THE KNIGHT WHO FELL

BY ALMA WOODWARD

WITH A DRAWING BY WILL FOSTER

A ROYAL blue touring-car, with bright nickel trimmings, rolled under the porte-cochère of the Belle Meadow Country Club and came to a halt before the carriage step. Its occupants—a woman of middle age, fashionably gowned, a slender, dreamy-eyed girl, and a man radiant in the latest motoring garb—alighted, aided by the deferential head steward, and were led to a choice corner table on the veranda.

The girl sank wearily into a roomy wicker chair and leaned back among the cushions.

"What a perfectly beautiful place to live!" she said softly. "I have never been here before."

The man leaned forward, alert, eager to catch her every word.

"Yes, it is a good sort of place for the three summer months—service excellent and everything top notch. It's near the property I'm developing at present, too; that's a very important factor."

The girl turned her large eyes upon him and her lips curled slightly at the corners.

"I was not thinking of any of those things when I said it was beautiful," she remarked, as if she were speaking to a child. "Look at the mysterious gloom of the thick woods over there, and that queer, blue, shadowy line at the horizon that means hills, and the gold light on the lake!"

Kent smiled and shook his head enthusiastically.

"Oh, yes; you mean the scenery. Well, I wish you could read the boost we give it in our advertising booklets. Why, that scenery is worth fifty thousand a year to me!"

The girl looked at him curiously for a

moment, then shrugged her shoulders ever so slightly and began to fuss with the tea service that a waiter had placed before her.

It was the mother who tried to fill in the breach.

"Enid is such a fanciful child, Mr. Kent," she purred, gazing at him the while through a disconcerting lorgnon. "Her father and I tell her she is a positive anachronism. She should have lived in the time of Sir Galahad. She's all dreams and fantasy!"

Kent took the cup Enid was holding toward him.

"Those chaps are all right between limp-leather covers, with illuminated type and gilt edges; but how long do you suppose one of 'em would last in Wall Street?"

"How long would a Wall Street man have lasted in the search for the Holy Grail?" she retorted gravely. "There are no men nowadays. There are only male creatures who appropriate the title with impunity!"

Under the scathing assault Kent quailed at first, then rallied bravely.

"Aren't you a trifle hard, Miss Foster?" he ventured at length. "Just what is your definition of a man?"

The girl leaned her slender arms on the table before her and placed her chin in the hollow of her clasped hands. Her eyes were luminous; her lips, vividly red, parted slightly.

"A man," she began slowly, "is one who has the courage of his convictions and will walk into the jaws of death to realize them. A man feels himself the natural protector of all women and will court danger to shelter the sex. A man is both tender and brutal, weak and strong, with a



" I WISH YOU COULD SEE THE BOOST WE GIVE IT IN OUR ADVERTISING BOOKLETS "

heart that loves passionately and that hates just as passionately when any meanness or treachery shows itself. That is my definition of a man!"

She stopped speaking and looked deep into Kent's eyes. He shifted uneasily under the calm, steady scrutiny, and lighted a cigarette to soothe his nerves.

"Well," he declared finally, with as much bravado as he could summon at the moment, "those chaps back in the early days had it all over us in the matter of trimmings, with their suits of mail, and horses laden with gay trappings, and battlements and moats and things," he finished rather indefinitely.

"Of course," Mrs. Foster chimed in between two sips of tea.

"Why," Kent went on, warming to the argument, "just imagine a man trying to be knightlike in the middle of Broadway! If he yanks a woman from under an automobile truck he's only a dub—but in the old days, I suppose, they'd have put a wreath of laurel on his brow!"

The girl looked her scorn across the table, and it stung.

"The qualities of a knight do not lie in woven cloths and clinking armor," she retorted indignantly. "They are embedded in the heart and soul of their possessor!"

This seemed to finish the discussion. That it should have done so there's no denying, but the man was loath to let go. He saw his heart's desire slipping from him, and he reached out wildly to save it.

"Well, what can a man do nowadays to prove he's not a coward—tell me that?" he asked meekly. "What could a man do to-day, for instance, that would seem like a deed of knightly chivalry?"

The girl threw back her head and laughed heartily, and the laugh hurt more than a sharp retort.

"I'm sure I don't know," she said gaily, and consulted a tiny watch in the handle of her parasol. "If we're to be back in time to dress for dinner, I'm afraid we'll have to be moving, mother dear."

Kent pushed back his chair and summoned the head steward.

"Have my car brought around, please," he ordered.

As he threw the light silk folds of the girl's motoring wrap about her she looked up at him mischievously.

"No good ever came of trying to resur-

rect the dead past," she whispered. "Chivalry is dead."

He watched the car bearing his two guests vanish down the road. After it was out of sight he watched the light clouds of dust it had raised settle down to earth again.

He searched the horizon sullenly for blue lines and peered disconsolately into the woods, trying to grow enthusiastic over their mysterious gloom. He was seeking inspiration in a vague, curious way, but despaired of ever finding it.

"I beg your pardon, sir, for disturbing you, sir." The trained tones of the head steward broke in upon his meditations. "Mr. Perry was looking for you an hour ago, and he's just come back. Will you see him, sir?"

"Ask him to come to my room," Kent answered.

Throwing his long coat over his arm, he disappeared through the wide doorway.

Two minutes later Perry, a tall, loose-jointed Yankee, chief engineer of Kent's real-estate firm, knocked at the door and was told to enter. Much to his delight, he was greeted warmly, even effusively. Before he had recovered his accustomed poise he found himself in a low, cushioned chair. His employer stood before him, a box of choice cigars in one hand and a flaming match in the other.

Dazzled by the luxury of it all, Perry selected a rare perfecto and lighted it. He knew that he would wake up soon, but in the mean time what was the use of letting anything good slide by?

Kent waited until he saw a cloud of fragrant smoke curl from between the chief engineer's lips.

"Before you tell me what you want to see me about I want to ask you a few questions," he began. "First, do any of the men we have working in our several gangs live near the Hemlock Terrace property?"

"Some," replied Perry between puffs. "There are two shacks on the Landon Road near the creek—eight of 'em live there."

"Ah!" The word slipped triumphantly from his employer. "Now I'm going to let you into a little something—just to see of what sort of clay you're made!"

Perry stopped puffing. It sounded as if his dignity were about to be put up as target for satirical shafts.

"What do you mean?" he ventured.

Kent patted him fraternally on the shoulder and went back to his chair.

"I wouldn't tell you this, Perry," he confided in a gentle, hesitating manner, "if I hadn't the utmost faith in your loyalty and ability to keep things to yourself."

The introduction sounded well. Clearly there wasn't going to be the least thing damaging to dignity in the disclosure.

"Have you ever been in love?" asked Kent rather sheepishly.

"Sure!" Here was common ground. "I was in love with four sisters, and they all died."

The sepulchral information rather floored the president. He coughed, because he didn't know exactly what else to do.

"Yes, I've had fierce luck in love," continued the puffing Don Juan. "Just as soon as I cottoned to one of 'em she'd up and die. There were two left, and the dominie told the mother that if she wanted to keep them she'd better tie the can to me; so she did!"

Kent was slightly discouraged. He had expected a somewhat finer appreciation of the soft emotion; but he realized that it was now or never.

"That's too bad—seemed a sort of fate, didn't it?" he sympathized.

"You bet! But what's the matter—are you in love?" Perry accused rather than questioned.

Kent nodded.

"I'm in love with a very beautiful, sweet girl," he explained; "but she's got an idea that I'm too practical, too full of business. She wants mush and romance. That comes of reading wild tales, medieval yarns—you know!"

"Sure!" agreed Perry coolly. "'Dead-Eye Dick,' 'Rough-House Rufus,' and that truck."

"Ye-es," gasped Kent; "that stuff. She thinks we all ought to go around fighting duels and cutting up our fellow men, just to win a lady's favor. She's a lovely girl, you understand; but she has notions."

There were sympathy and understanding in the chief engineer's eye. His experience with the four dear departed ones had acquainted him with the fact that battle, murder, and sudden death go hand in hand with love.

"Now just a minute ago," the president went on, waxing enthusiastic, "an idea

came to me whereby, with your aid, I can produce the desired effect. I am helpless, though, without your aid, my dear Perry."

The humble confession, strengthened by repetition, made Perry's heart swell. He mentally tested the strength of his right arm and prepared to offer up his life, if necessary, on the altar of his employer's love.

"Suppose," Kent began eagerly, "suppose that to-morrow night, about nine thirty, an automobile containing two ladies and a man should roll along the Landon Road near the creek. At nine thirty, these moonless nights, it's as dark as the Plutonian regions along there, isn't it?"

"Darker 'n—yes, it's fierce dark!" amended Perry.

"Well, what could be easier than a little hold-up—fake, of course? Then the man in the machine—that's me—gets up and does the bing-bing act with a six-shooter, puts the highwaymen to the bad, saves the ladies, and spins away—a hero! Are you on?"

Perry twisted nervously in his chair.

"No; can't say that I am, cap. Give us that last once more, will you?"

Kent cleared his throat. He had it all worked out so beautifully in his own mind that it seemed stupid of Perry not to understand immediately.

"About nine thirty to-morrow night," he began again—this time painstakingly, "an auto, containing the young lady with whom I'm in love, her mother, and myself, will glide quietly along the Landon Road near the creek. Just in the darkest spot the eight men you speak of, who live in shacks right there, headed by you, will hold up the machine. The ladies will no doubt be terror-stricken. Then I pull out my trusty gun, kill half a dozen of you, and toot-toot away safely. It'll show me up great—and that's all that's necessary; after that the wedding march and orange-blossoms are easy. Are you on?"

The lank one scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Yes, I'm on all right—but where do we get off?" he inquired after a moment.

"We? Who?"

"Why, the boys and me. Do we get plugged full of perfectly good lead just to do parlor stunts for the dames?"

The president hastened to reassure him.

"Only blank cartridges," he whispered.

"You boys have got to do a little acting—

it's as easy as rolling off a log. Just fall down in the dust a few times, kick a little bit, and then die—a few groans might help some, and a shriek here and there. Think you can manage it?"

"If you say for sure that there'll be no target-practise, I guess I can get the boys to do it up brown. To-morrow night at nine thirty, you say? All right, cap!"

II

AT nine twenty-five the following night a royal blue touring-car, with headlights strangely dim, slowed down as it neared a crossroads. Two spectral white posts pointed fantom fingers in right-angled directions.

"We'll go this way," decided the one male occupant, twisting his wheel suddenly.

The girl sitting beside him laid a slender ungloved hand on his arm.

"Oh, no—that road looks so dark!" she shuddered. "Let's go the other way."

"But this is the nearest way home," protested the man. "It's getting too cool for your mother to be out, I think. Besides, why do you fear when you are with me?" He said this gravely—very gravely.

The girl shrugged her shoulders slightly. It was not a disparagement of his protective virtues, but merely a sign of acquiescence. The stillness was unbroken. There wasn't even the night call of some wandering bird. Once the left wheel splashed through a black puddle, and the sound seemed extraordinarily loud.

A little farther on a light breeze sprang up and rustled the low bushes along the roadway with that ghostly, whispering sound that is so nearly human in the dark.

"Why are we going so slowly?" breathed the girl, afraid of the sound her own voice was going to make.

"Because the road is rather tricky," answered her escort lightly, "and a little farther on there's a good-sized creek. You wouldn't care especially for a nocturnal plunge, would you?"

"Oh, Mr. Kent!" This in a well-bred wail from the tonneau. "Do be careful driving over it! Those planked bridges are usually so treacherous! I don't see why we came this way at all—really I don't!"

"My dear Mrs. Foster"—Kent turned apologetically—"it is all my fault, and I dare say you'll never want to go motoring

with me again. It was so dark that I made a mistake at the second crossing—going south instead of east. It'll make us perhaps half an hour later getting into town, that's all."

The lady in the tonneau settled more closely in her rugs, determined to make the best of it; but the girl touched him again ever so lightly, and sent the blood leaping through his veins.

"Perhaps if you put on just a little more speed it wouldn't seem so ghostly and horrible," she urged. "I don't think I ever knew before what real darkness is!"

A faint suggestion of shallow water slipping over stones came to their ears.

"The creek," explained Kent.

The words had just left his lips when a deep voice out of the gloom commanded: "Halt!"

With a sudden wrench and a grinding of the brake, the machine came to a standstill. There was a series of staccato shrieks from the tonneau, a frightened sob from the girl, and a low but forceful bit of profanity from Kent.

Out from the gloom emerged figures of blackness—silent, grim—nine in all.

"Hands up!"

The dread order echoed over the fields. Two pairs of feminine hands shot spasmodically vertical.

"Put up your hands, Mr. Kent!" screamed Mrs. Foster in deadly terror. "They'll kill us—they'll murder us!"

"Put up your hands," pleaded the girl in a low tone. "For my sake, Don!"

"Put up my hands?" echoed Kent scornfully. "Not on your life! I'll give them a run for their money! I'll show them that an American citizen won't stand for highway robbery!"

With a wild but at the same time picturesque gesture, he whipped his gun from his hip-pocket and fired. Full in the face of that outlaw band he fired—once, twice—again and yet again. The reports were deafening; a choking, unpleasant smoke filled the air, and through it sounded the high-pitched shrieks of Mrs. Foster. The girl, tense and silent, waited for the smoke to clear away—she knew the utter devastation that would be revealed!

The smoke cleared; but, to her dismay, instead of prostrate, lifeless forms, she looked upon the original nine still standing in easy, careless poses—picturesque additions to the scenery. One man was whis-

ting the "Suwanee River" with variations. Then suddenly the tallest figure of the lot advanced toward the machine and, lounging gracefully on the engine, stood with his nose not three inches from the smoking muzzle of Kent's gun.

"That's all right, cap," he said soothingly. "That's all right; but just put up your gun for a minute."

The gun slipped from Kent's nerveless fingers and rattled to the floor of the car. Mrs. Foster switched to a minor key; the girl began to cry softly. The spokesman turned a pocket flash on her face.

"Don't cry, lady," he said. "We ain't going to touch you. We just want to speak to this gentleman a minute. We won't harm him. Come along, cap, right over here for a minute."

"Oh, don't leave us, Mr. Kent! We shall all be murdered! If I ever get out of this alive I'll never set foot in another automobile as long as I live! I'll—"

"I told you we wouldn't hurt him, lady. Won't you take my word for it?" demanded the man with the flash. "Come on, cap."

Despite the hysterical pleading of his terrified companions, the president of the Gloria Land and Improvement Company descended from the machine and followed the nine across the road, vanishing almost immediately into the darkness. There was one last despairing shriek from the car—then silence.

Over in a dense clump of trees, lighted fitfully and faintly by the pocket flash, Donald Kent faced his chief engineer and the eight members of his concrete-laying gang.

"What does this mean?" he spluttered, almost choking with rage.

Perry laid a calming hand on his heavy shoulder.

"Now don't you go and get excited, cap," he said gently. "It's all right—everything's going to turn out all right."

"Yes," chimed in a short, thick-set concrete artist. "We just got a little paper here for you to sign, an' then we'll let you go, without touchin' a hair of your head."

"Paper?" repeated the president blankly. "What are you talking about?"

"Well," explained Perry, realizing that some explanation had to be made, "when I spied off this hold-up act to the boys they were only too anxious to do it. Why, they'd do anything for you, cap! Now

they've been doin' ten hours at three sixty a day, haven't they? Well, what they want is nine hours at four dollars. Surely that's reasonable, ain't it? And they just thought that this would be an opportune time to hit for it—see?"

"We knowed you was a man wot liked everything neat and reg'lar, so we got it all writ out, and Mr. Perry here brought along his fountain pen. Now you jest put yer name at the end of it, and it'll all be as merry as a strawb'rry festival. Here, Tom, hold the flash fer cap—he can't see to write in the dark!"

Kent leaned limply against a tall birch. The carefully nurtured Roman gladiator aspect was no more.

"The ladies'll certainly catch cold out there in that there car!" suggested one.

"Sign it an' get away at once," advised Perry. "It's the most sensible thing to do. Come on!" He held out the slip of paper encouragingly.

"Oh, I don't mind the money so much," confessed Kent, addressing himself to the engineer; "but after what I told you yesterday afternoon I should think you'd be ashamed to do this!"

Perry hung his head.

"It lay with the boys," he said. "They're not harming you. They only want their rights, cap."

"I told you I wanted to pull off this scrap to impress the young lady. My happiness depended on it; and here you've made me look a fool, a coward, a simpleton!"

Kent's voice broke slightly; the indignity of it was simply overwhelming.

"No such thing," interrupted Perry. "As soon as you sign this we're going to put up a game fight. You'll be a hero in ten minutes, cap!"

"Oh, yes!" sneered Kent. "With my gun lying on the floor of the car!"

Perry extended another.

"Here's mine," he said. "I thought yours might give out. Now just as soon as you get your name written you start the scrap, and we'll chime in!"

Kent took the pen and by the intermittent light of the flash signed his name. Perry blew on the wet ink, folded the slip, and placed it carefully in an inside pocket.

"Now!" he signaled.

Kent promptly hauled off and landed one that sang on the lower jaw of the

nearest concrete-modeler. Then, with a hoarse oath here and a muttered answer there, the fight was on. In the hot fury of it the jumbled mass of humanity edged across the road again to where the stalled machine stood.

Kent slashed here and batted there. His blood warmed with the glory of it as man after man went down to the dust before his wild, unskilled blows. Then, in the dimness of his consciousness, he thought he heard:

"Give him a good soak! You'll never have the chance again! Hand him one for me!"

Suddenly he found himself the center of attraction—a magnet toward which all blows came, straight as a homing dove, with never a hint of deviation. He must surely be dreaming. Soon he would awake from the unpleasant nightmare; but in the mean time some one was carrying out those instructions to the last letter!

Finally, with a last desperate lunge, he stumbled on the step of his car and crawled to the seat; trying to stand erect. Some one accommodately cranked her up; and Kent, throwing in the clutch, with his last bit of strength discharged the contents of the six chambers at the yelling mob of nine.

About a mile farther up the road he stopped his machine under a solitary arc-light and surveyed its contents. Stretched obliquely across the seat lay Mrs. Foster in a dead faint. At her feet was a crumpled mass of chiffon veils and white serge—Enid, also unconscious.

Weakly he reached for his pocket-flask and, despite his dismay at having two fainting females on his hands, took a long, soul-reviving pull at it. He needed a bracer—oh, how vividly he realized that he needed it!

A few moments later Mrs. Foster came to, and between them they revived the fainting Enid. Then came the crushing blow.

"Yes," exclaimed the mother dramat-

ically, "Enid fainted directly you left the car, and I fainted when the men began to knock you around the road!"

Shades of Sir Galahad! The furious conflict gone for naught!

III

NEXT morning the president of the Gloria Land and Improvement Company let himself into his private office without making undue noise. His left eye would have furnished splendid material for a sketch of a Venetian sunset. His lower lip, pretty well shredded but still a lip, protruded ungracefully, and there was a network of adhesive tape on various parts of his head and face.

As he carefully lowered himself into his chair, a process that was rather painful at the moment, the door opened gently and on his crippled sight dawned the length of his chief engineer.

Every drop of blood that had survived the previous night's shedding rose to the president's face. He reached for something in his hip-pocket, but it was not there.

"Won't keep you a minute, cap," whispered Perry confidentially; "but say, just between us two—last night in the scrimmage one of the boys missed his watch, an heirloom from his grandfather. It can't be found anywhere. How about it—anything doing, cap?"

With a sigh of complete surrender and a weak flutter of his vivid eyelids, the would-be knight reached deep into his pocket and drew out a yellowback. Then, without a word, he rose carefully from his chair and led his betrayer to the door.

As the sound of vanishing footfalls came to his ears, the president of the Gloria Land and Improvement Company addressed the ink-well on his desk.

"No good ever came of trying to resurrect the past. Chivalry is dead." He stopped for a moment, then added viciously: "Yes, and last night it was cremated!"

THE CLIMBING ROAD

WHERE do you go, oh, climbing road, mounting, mounting ever?
"I go," it seems to answer back, "to seek the great endeavor!"

Be mine your way, oh, climbing road, mounting, mounting ever,
For still my heart within me cries to seek the great endeavor.

Clinton Scollard

JOAN THURSDAY*

BY LOUIS JOSEPH VANCE

AUTHOR OF "THE BRASS BOWL," "THE BLACK BAG," "THE BANDBOX," ETC.

XXXIV (*continued*)

AT daylight Quard staggered in, with the assistance of the same bell-boy and his negro dresser. His eyes were glazed, his face ghastly, his mind wandered; he was as helpless as a child. With the aid of the boys, Joan managed to undress the man and put him to bed. At once he fell asleep, with the cold stump of a half-burned cigar obstinately clenched between his teeth. It was an hour before the muscles of his jaw relaxed enough to release it.

Dressing, Joan left the hotel, swallowed some coffee and food—tasteless to her—in a near-by restaurant, and walked the streets until eight o'clock, when she found a drug-store open, and consulted the clerk. He advised bromo-seltzer and aromatic spirits of ammonia. Armed with these, she returned to her husband.

Shortly after noon, daring to delay no longer, she roused him by sprinkling cold water in his face—all other methods having failed even to interrupt his heavy and stertorous breathing. It was some time before she could induce him to swallow the pick-me-up, and it required no less than three strong doses, together with as much black coffee, and followed by a cold bath, to restore him to presentable condition. However, in the end, she succeeded in getting him to the theater in time for the *matinée* performance.

Through it all she uttered no single word of reproach, but waited on the man with every outward sign of sympathy and devotion.

When another nap at the hotel, after the *matinée*, had brought him to more complete realization of what had happened, his remorse was touching and, as long as it

lasted, sincere. Joan accepted without comment his lame explanation as to the manner of his temptation and fall during an all-night session at poker "with the boys," and gave credence to his protestations that it would never happen again.

But three weeks later, in Chicago, it did happen again, though under somewhat less distressing circumstances. As before, he left her in the lobby "to finish his cigar and chin with a friend." Within an hour he was half led, half carried, to the room in a hopelessly sodden condition. The actor with whom he had been drinking accompanied him, apparently quite sober, but puzzled. After Quard had been helped to bed, his companion explained to the girl that her husband's collapse had been incomprehensibly due to no more than three drinks.

"I never seen nothin' like it," the man expostulated, with an air of grievance. "There he was, standin' up against the bar, with his foot on the rail, laughin' and kiddin' like the rest of us; and he'd only had three drinks of whisky—though I *will* say they was man-size drinks. All of a sudden he turns white as a sheet and begins to mutter to himself. We all thinks he's joshin' until he keels over, limp as a rag. If the stuff gets to him like that, he's got no business touchin' it, ever."

These experiences continued at varying intervals; and presently Joan began to understand that Quard had not only primarily a weakness to tempt him, but a constitutional inability to assert his will-power after he had surrendered to the extent of a single drink. The first one seemed to exercise a sort of hypnotic power, driving him on whether he would or not to the next, the next, and the next, until the nadir of unconsciousness was reached.

* This story began in the December (1912) number of *MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE*

It was not that he invariably succumbed to moderate indulgence, but that, once started, he never stopped until his identity was completely submerged. Indeed, the way of alcohol with him seemed never twice to follow the same route; but its culmination was invariably identical.

Hoping against hope, fighting with him, pleading with him, reasoning, threatening, even praying, Joan endured for a long time—much longer than in retrospective days seemed possible even to her; for she was honestly fond of her husband, far more so than she was ever of any other living being save herself. And, profound as was her egoism, she might have continued without end her efforts to save him from himself, had not her own sin at length arisen to confront and confound her.

They reached San Francisco the third week in April. For some time Quard had been drinking rather methodically but stealthily. A threat made by Joan, while he was sobering up from his last debauch, to the effect that on a repetition of the offense she would leave him without an hour's notice, had frightened the man to the degree of making him hesitate to add one drink to another except at intervals long enough to retard the cumulative effect. Nevertheless, scarcely a day passed on which, in spite of her watchfulness, he did not contrive to throw several sops to the devil in possession, if without ever quite losing his wits.

Detected with a reeking breath, he would adopt one of three attitudes—he was a man, subject to the domination of no woman and of no appetite, had learned his lesson, and now knew when to stop; or he was sorry, and wouldn't let it go any further; or nothing of the sort had happened, he had drunk nothing except a glass of soda-fountain nerve-tonic, and possibly it was his cigar that she smelled. With the first, Joan had no patience; and since she had a temper, it was the last resort in Quard's sober stages, seldom assumed save when potations had made him either indifferent or vicious. In his contrition, whether real or assumed, she tried hard to believe. But his lies never deceived her; to these she listened in the silence of contempt and despair.

On Wednesday afternoon the girl left the theater to do some shopping. It was half past five before she returned to their hotel. She walked into their room, to find

the actor, with his coat off, seated in a chair that faced the door. His back was to the windows, through which the declining sun was throwing a flood of blinding, golden light, so that Joan's dazzled vision comprehended only the masses of his body, details escaping her.

"Hello, deary!" she said, lightly enough, in the abstraction of reviewing some especially pleasing purchases.

Closing the door, she walked over to the bureau, put down her wrist-bag and a small parcel, and removed her hat. While thus engaged, the fact that Quard had not answered penetrated her absorption. Disposing of her hat, she looked half casually over her shoulder, to discover that he had not moved.

Two surmises struck through her mood—that he had fallen asleep waiting for her; or, as she thought with poignant apprehension, that he had been drinking. But this latter seemed hardly likely; he had been entirely rational and sober during the matinée.

"What's the matter?" she said sharply.

Quard made no answer.

With a troubled sigh she moved to his chair and bent over him. His eyes were wide and blazing, and met hers with a look of inflexible hostility and rage. His mouth was set like a trap, his lips—and indeed all his face—almost colorless. The air was pungent with his breath, but intuitively she divined that it was not drunkenness alone which had aroused this temper, the more dismaying since it was for the time being under control.

From the look in his eyes she started back as from a blow.

"Charlie! What's the matter?"

The man opened his lips, gulped spasmodically, closed them without speaking. The muscles on the left side of his face twitched nervously. Abruptly he shot up out of the chair, strode to the door, locked it, and pocketed the key. His face as he turned was terrible to her.

She shrank away, but his eyes held her in the fascination of fright.

"Why, Charlie! What—"

He interrupted her with an imperative gesture, took a step toward her, and shook his hand in her face. Between his thumb and forefinger something glittered exquisitely coruscant in the sunlight.

"What's that?" he demanded in a shaking voice.

She moved her head in assumed bewilderment, staggered to recognize the symbol of her broken troth with Matthias.

"I don't know. What is it? You keep moving around so, I can't see."

"There, then!" he cried, steadying the hand under her nose.

Instinctively her gaze veered to her trunk. Its lid was up, and on the floor beside it lay her work-basket in a litter of its former contents. Her indignation mounted.

"What were you doing in my trunk?" she demanded hotly.

Quard's eyes clouded under the impact of this counter-attack. Momentarily his dazed expression made it very plain that he had seized the opportunity of her absence to drink heavily. And it was more plain in the blurred accents—robbed of the sharpness that rage had lent them—in which he endeavored to justify himself.

"I wanted—shew on s'pender button—wanted work-basket." Anger returned; his voice mounted. "And I found this! What is it?"

"It's mine. Give it to me!"

Joan snatched at the ring, but he withdrew his hand too quickly for her.

"Where'd you get it? Tha'sh what I want'er know!"

"None of your business. Give it—"

"I'm your husband, an' I got a right to know where you get diamonds"—he sneered—"diamonds like *this*! I never bought it."

"No," she flamed back; "you're too stingy!"

"Stingy, am I?" He faltered, swaying. "Tha's 'nough. I'm tightwad, so s'mother fellow gets chance to buy you diamonds. Tha's way of it, hey?"

"You give me that ring, Charlie," Joan insisted ominously.

"You got another good guess coming. What I'll give you is jush two minutes to tell me name of the fellow't give it to you."

Joan extended her hand pleadingly, with a shift of manner.

"Give me the ring, Charlie, and be sensible. I haven't done anything wrong. I can explain."

"Well!" Grudgingly he dropped the ring into her palm; but immediately her fingers had closed upon it, mistrust again possessed him. "Now, you tell me—"

"Very well," she interrupted patiently. "You needn't shout. I don't mind telling you now. It's my engagement-ring."

"Your *what*?" he cut in sharply.

"My engagement-ring. I was engaged last summer to Mr. Gaunt, before we began to rehearse the sketch."

"Engaged?" he iterated stupidly. "Engaged for what?"

"Engaged to be married. He was in love with me. I meant to marry him, until you and I met the second time—"

"Meant to marry who?"

"Mr. Gaunt. We—"

"Gaunt? What Gaunt?"

"Matthias Gaunt, the author—the playwright. He wrote 'The Jade God.'"

Quard wagged his head cunningly.

"Y'mean to tell me you was engaged to that man, and didn't marry him?"

"Certainly. I married you, didn't I, dear?"

"And if that's true, how't happen you didn't give'm back his ring? *Eh?*"

"I meant to, Charlie, but he was out of town, and I didn't know his address."

"That's *likely*!" The actor laughed harshly. "Tha'sh *good* one, that is. You going to marry him, and didn't know his address. Expect me to believe that?"

"It's true, Charlie—it's God's truth."

"You're a liar!"

"Charlie!"

"I say, you're a liar! Wha'sh more, I mean it." Quard waved his hand, palm down, indicating his impatient disposition of her story. He staggered, and steadied himself by clutching the back of the chair. Realizing how this betrayed his condition, he worked himself into a towering rage to cover it. "I know better. 'F you'd ever got a chance to marry that feller, you'd jumped at it. He'd never 've got away. You wouldn't 've given him no more chance 'n you did me—you'd 've pulled the wool over his eyes same way. I know what'm talking about. You're a liar!"

Joan's color deserted her face entirely.

"Charlie, don't you say that to me again."

"And what'll you do? Think I care? I know now who gave you that ring. I was fool not to know it before. I didn't give it to you—no! Gaunt didn't give it to you—no! But somebody did give it to you—*eh?* That's right, isn't it? And his name was Vincent Marbridge, wasn't it?"

He thrust his inflamed face close to hers, leering wickedly.

"Marbridge!" she echoed blankly.

"Vincent Marbridge—tha's the feller 't

give you the ring. He's the feller 't could do it, too—got all the money in the world—enough to buy you a dozen rings—enough to buy you all them good clothes you got hold of after you threw me down, and before I was ass enough to take up with you again! You were a fool not to get more out o' him."

The insult ate like an acid into the pride of the girl. She flushed crimson and in an instant paled again. Her eyes grew cold and hard.

"That will do," she said bitterly. "You've said enough—too much. After all I've endured from you—your drunkenness, your—"

There was a maniac glare in the eyes of the man as he thrust his face still closer.

"And what'll you do, eh?" he shouted violently. She turned her face aside in disgust of his reeking breath. "What'll you do? Tell me that!"

"I'll leave you—"

"You betcha life you'll leave me! I knew *that* before you come into this room!"

"And I'm sorry I didn't go long ago—" she began in a rage.

"The devil you are!" In a gust of uncontrollable frenzy he struck her sharply over the mouth. "You go now, d'you hear, you —."

At the foul word he added, Joan flung herself upon him in blind fury, sobbing, biting, scratching, kicking. He reeled back before the expected assault; then, sobered a trifle by its viciousness, he caught her wrists, held her helpless for an instant, and threw her violently from him. She went to her knees, and lurched over on her side.

The door slammed; he was gone.

XXXV

JOAN knew Quard well enough to know that he would make for the nearest bar; it was only a question as to what shape his intoxication would assume. It was possible that he would drink himself raving mad and return fit for murder. She must make her escape with all possible expedition.

Instantly she sat up, dried her eyes, convulsively swallowed her sobs, and felt of her bruised mouth.

Before her on the carpet the diamond ring winked sardonically in the sunset light. She pondered savagely the wide and deep damnation it had brought into her life. It seemed impossible that only a few minutes had elapsed since she had entered the

room an affectionate, patient, and not unhappy wife. Now she sifted her heart and found in it not one grain of the love it had held for Quard. That alone would have rendered irrevocable her decision to leave him. With all her heart she hoped that the sketch would go to pieces without her.

Rising, she went to the mirror, to stare incredulously at the face it presented for her inspection—a cruel caricature, lined, distorted, blowsy, stained with tears. At this sight, hysteria threatened again. With a great effort she fought it down and controlled and smoothed out the muscles of her face.

Now she was more recognizable. Even her mouth was not seriously disfigured; he had struck her with the flat of his hand only. Her lips were sore and slightly puffed; but a veil would disguise them completely.

At the wash-stand she devoted some precious moments to sopping her face with cold water, and particularly her mouth and eyes. The treatment toned down the inflammation of weeping and rendered her flesh firm and cool once more. It also left her with a feeling of spiritual refreshment, with nerves again under control and her will more inalterably fixed even than before. Rouge and powder completed her rejuvenescence.

Turning to her trunk, she lifted out the tray—and paused with a low cry of consternation. From the tumbled and disordered state of the contents it was evident that, having discovered the ring, Quard had searched diligently for further confirmation of his suspicions.

With quickening breathing the girl dropped to her knees and hastily turned out all her belongings upon the floor. She soon satisfied herself of the appalling fact that Quard had not only insulted and cast her off—he had stooped to rob her. Her hands were tied; she had not money enough to leave him.

Probably, with the low cunning and fallacious reasoning of the dipsomaniac, he had poached her savings with that very thought in mind. Meaning to break with her, to have his scene and satisfy his lust for brutality, he had also planned to prevent her leaving the cast of "The Lie" until her successor could be found and broken in. Penniless, she would be compelled to play on, at least until Saturday, to earn her fare back East.

It was Quard's practise to carry his money in large bills folded in a belt of oiled silk buckled round his waist, beneath his underclothing—with a smaller fund for running expenses in a leather bill-fold more accessibly disposed. Joan, finding a money-belt uncomfortable, had adopted the shiftless plan of secreting her savings in a pocket contrived for the purpose in an old skirt. Since she had always held her husband rigidly to account for her individual fifty dollars a week, she had managed to set aside about three hundred dollars. Unfortunately it had been their habit to carry duplicate keys to each other's luggage by way of provision against loss.

So now she was left with less than twenty dollars in her pocketbook.

She paced the floor in wrathful meditation, pondering, weighing ways and means and expedients. Once or twice she noticed the ring, but she passed it several times before she paused, picked it up, and abstractedly placed it on her finger.

It did not occur to her that she could raise money by hypothecating the jewel at a pawn-shop. By hook or crook she was determined to regain her own savings. She was wondering what good it would do her to threaten the man with arrest; had a wife any right to her earnings, under the law?

After a time she opened her wrist-bag, found her personal bunch of keys, and unlocked Quard's trunk. Her pains, however, went for nothing; she diligently searched every pocket of his clothing without discovering a piece of money of any description. But one thing she did find to make her thoughtful—Quard's revolver.

Removing this last, she relocked the trunk and rang for a bell-boy. She put the weapon on the bureau and covered it with her hat.

The youth who answered had an intelligent look. Joan appraised him narrowly before trusting him. Then she opened negotiations with a dollar tip.

"I want you to find my husband for me," she said. "If he's anywhere around the hotel, it'll probably be in the bar. But look everywhere, and then come and tell me. You needn't say anything to him. Do you understand?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"You'd know him if you saw him?"

"Yes, ma'am."

"That's all. Hurry!"

As soon as he was gone she turned again

to her luggage, selecting indispensable garments and toilet articles and packing them in a suit-case. When a knock sounded upon the door she had the case strapped and locked.

"He ain't nowhere about the house, ma'am," the boy reported. "He was in the bar a while, but he's went out."

Joan nodded, dumb in thought.

"Do you want as I should look for him, ma'am?"

"Can you leave the hotel?" she asked quickly.

"I'm just going off duty now, ma'am; the night shift came on about ten minutes ago—at six o'clock."

"And you think you could possibly find him?"

"He took a cab, ma'am. The driver's stand is in front of the hotel. If I can find him, I can find where your husband went. Anyhow it ain't hard to follow up a gentleman as was so—"

"Drunk!" Joan put in when the boy hesitated. "Beastly drunk!"

"Yes, ma'am."

Joan weighed the chance distrustfully; but it was at least a chance, and this was no time to be careful. Taking a five-dollar gold piece from her scanty store, she gave it to the boy.

"Go find him," she said. "If he seems to know what he's doing, just hang around until he doesn't; he won't keep you waiting long. Then bring him to me. But first take this suit-case down to the Union Ferry, check it in the baggage-room, and give me the check when you bring him back. And mind—don't say anything to anybody."

"Yes, ma'am."

Supperless, she sat down to wait, Quard's revolver ready to her hand.

Twilight waned; night fell; hours passed. Motionless and imperturbable she waited, the tenseness of her mood betrayed only by the burning of her baleful, dangerous eyes.

At half past nine the noise of scuffling feet, gruff voices, and heavy breathing in the hallway, following the clash of an elevator gate, brought her to her feet. Going to the bureau, she opened a drawer and put the revolver away. There would be no need of that now.

Answering a knock, she threw the door wide. Two porters staggered in, one with Quard's shoulders, one with his feet. The

bell-boy followed. When they had lugged to the bed the inert and insensate thing that she once had loved, Joan tipped the men and they departed. The boy lingered.

"Is there anything more I can do, ma'am?"

"Where did you find him?"

"Down on the Coast. I don't know what wouldn't 've happened to him if you hadn't sent me after him. He was up an alley—he'd been stuck up by a couple of strong-arms. I seen 'em making their getaway just as I come in sight."

She gave a cry of despair.

"Robbed, you mean?"

"Yes, ma'am. He ain't got as much as a nickel on him."

Overwhelmed, Joan sank into a chair. The boy avoided her desolate eyes. He was a little afraid she might want part of the five dollars back.

"Hadn't I better send the hotel doctor up, ma'am?"

"Perhaps," she muttered dully.

"Yes, ma'am. And here's your baggage-check. Nothing else? Good night, ma'am."

The door closed; his footsteps died away down the corridor.

Of a sudden Joan jumped up and ran to the bed in the alcove. Quard's condition was pitiable, but excited no compassion in her. His face was pallid as a death-mask, save on one cheek-bone, where there was an angry and livid contusion. His hands were scratched, bleeding, and filthy, his clothing begrimed and torn, his pockets turned inside out. He seemed scarcely to breathe, and a thin froth flecked his swollen lips.

With feverish haste she unbuttoned his shirt and trousers and tugged at his undershirt. Then she sobbed aloud—a short, dry sob of relief. She had discovered the money-belt. In another minute she had unbuckled and withdrawn it from his body. She took it to the other room, to the light, and hastily undid its fastenings.

There were perhaps two dozen fresh, new bills, for the most part of large denominations, folded once lengthwise, to fit into the narrow silken tube. She noticed several hundred-dollar notes. She began to count, but before she had run half through the lot some one knocked. Hastily cramming the money into her wrist-bag, with the telltale belt, she took a deep breath and said:

"Come in."

There entered a grave man of middle age with a physician's satchel. He said, with a slight inclination of his head:

"Mrs. Quard, I believe?"

"Yes," Joan gasped. She nodded toward the alcove. "Your patient's there."

For several minutes he worked steadily over the drunkard. While she waited, her wits awhirl, Joan automatically pinned on her hat.

Presently the physician stepped back into the room, removed his coat, and turned back his cuffs. With narrowing eyes he recognized her preparations for the street.

"Is he all right, doctor?" she asked with a feint of doubt and fear.

"He's in pretty bad shape, but I guess we can pull him around all right. But I need your help. You were going out?"

She met his eyes steadily.

"I was only waiting to hear how he was. I've got to go to the theater. I'm late now. If we miss the performance to-night, we may lose our booking. And he's just been held up—all we've got is what's coming to us next Saturday."

"I see. And you can do without him?"

"His understudy'll take his part—we'll manage somehow."

"Then I am afraid I shall have to call in assistance—a trained nurse."

"Do, please, doctor."

"Very well."

He moved toward the telephone.

"I'll be back in about an hour," said Joan, at the door.

"Very well, Mrs. Quard."

He stared, a little perplexed, at the door, when she shut it.

Avoiding the elevator and lobby, she slipped down the stairs and by a side entrance to the street. In ten minutes she was at the Union Ferry. Within an hour she was in Oakland, purchasing through tickets for her transcontinental flight.

XXXVI

WHEN he had finished breakfast, Mathias filled and lighted a pipe, set his feet in the diagonal groove they had worn from door to window, and began his matutinal tramp toward inspiration. But this morning found his mind singularly sluggish. Thoughts would not come; or if they showed themselves at all, it was only to peer mischievously at him round some distant corner, which when turned discovered only an empty *impasse*.

Distressed, he tamped down his pipe, ran long fingers through his hair, and wrapped himself in clouds of smoke. Then a breath of cool, sweet air fanned his cheek, and he looked round in sharp annoyance. It was like that fool maid to leave the windows open and freeze him to death!

Truly enough, they were both wide open from top to bottom; though at the same time he was not freezing. And outside there was a bright crimson border of potted geraniums on the iron-railed balcony. He hadn't noticed them before; Mme. Duprat must have set them out before he was up. Curious whim of hers! Curious weather!

Disliking inconsistencies, he stopped at one of the windows to investigate the cause of these untoward phenomena.

In one corner of the back yard a dilapidated bundle of fur and bones, conforming in general with a sardonic post-impressionist's opinion of a tomcat, lay blinking lazily in a patch of warm, yellow sunlight.

In the next yard a ridiculous young person with bare legs, blue denim overalls, and a small red sweater, was industriously turning up the earth with a twelve-inch trowel, and chanting cheerfully to himself an improvisation in honor of the garden that was to be.

At an open window across the way a public-spirited and extremely pretty young woman appeared with a towel pinned round her shoulders and let down her hair, like a shimmering cascade of gold, for the sun's rays to wanton with—and, incidentally, to dry.

Somewhere down the street a cracked old piano-organ was romping and giggling rapturously through the syncopated measures of Tin Pan Alley's latest "rag."

Before Matthias's eyes there drifted a vision of the green slopes of Tanglewood, the white château on its windy headland, the ineffable blue of the Sound beyond. Incredulous, he turned back to his calendar. The day was Wednesday, the 17th of April. It was true, then! Almost without his knowledge a bleak and barren winter had worn away, and spring had stolen upon town—flaunting, extravagant, shy, seductive, irresistible spring!

For a little Matthias held back in doubt, with reluctant thoughts of his typewriter and manuscripts. Then, all in a breath, he found his hat and stick, slammed the door behind him, and blundered forth to fulfil his destiny.

Having swung round the upper reservoir, he came at full stride down along the West Drive in Central Park, his blood romping, his eyes aglow, warm color in his face. For the first time in half a year he felt himself again—Matthias the lover of the open skies, divorced from Gaunt of the midnight lamp and the scored and intricate manuscripts—Gaunt whom the world rejected.

Two women sat on a bench in a retired spot sheltered from the breeze and open to the sun. At a word from one of them, the other rose and moved to intercept the pedestrian. At the sound of his name Matthias paused, wondering who she could be.

"Yes," he said, lifting his hat. "I am Mr. Gaunt—"

"Mrs. Marbridge would like to speak to you."

His glance shot quickly in the direction of her brief nod. He saw Venetia waiting on the bench. Immediately he went to her, in his surprise forgetful of the other woman, who moved slowly in the other direction and sat down out of ear-shot.

"This is awfully good of you, Venetia," he said, bending over her hand. "I didn't see you, of course. I was thinking of something else—"

"But I was thinking of you," she said. "I've been waiting to see you for a long time, Matthias."

"Surely Helena could have told you where to reach me?"

"I knew we'd run across each other, somehow, somewhere, to-day or some time," she said. "So I was content to do without the offices of Helena. Do sit down. I want so much to talk to you."

"Most completely yours to command," he said with an air of lightness, and took the place beside her.

His heart was on his lips and in his eyes, and she was far from blind.

"Tell me about yourself," she suggested. "It's been so long since I've had any news of you."

"Is it possible? I should have imagined that my doting Aunt Helena—"

She cut him short with a slight, negative smile and shake of her head.

"Helena doesn't approve of me, you know," she explained; "and of late there has been a decided coolness between the families. I'm afraid George fell out with Vincent for some reason—not too hard to guess, perhaps."

He looked away, coloring with embarrassment.

"So," she pursued evenly, "about yourself—are you married yet?"

Matthias started, laughed frankly.

"You didn't know about that, either? Well, it's true that even Helena couldn't have told you much about it, for I told her nothing. No, I'm neither married, nor like to be."

"She was so very sweet and pretty—"

"Joan was wholly charming," he agreed, "but—well, I fancy it was inevitable. We were lucky enough to be separated for some weeks, and so had time to think. She must have realized the mistake we were on the point of making, and got out in time."

"You think it would have been a mistake, Matthias?"

"Oh, unquestionably. I confess I shouldn't have thought so, probably, until too late, if she hadn't shown me by throwing me over. I hope it doesn't sound cad-dish, but I was conscious of a distinct sense of relief when I got back from California and found she'd gone away without leaving me a line."

"I think I understand. But did you never hear from her?"

"Not from—by accident, of her. She was predestined for the stage—I can see that clearly now, though I objected then. She got a chance during my absence and jumped at it, and made a sort of a half-way hit in a very successful sketch which, oddly enough, I happened to have written—under a pseudonym. It had been kicking round my agent's office for a year; he didn't believe in it any more than I did; and I disbelieved in it hard enough to be ashamed to sign my own name to it. That's often the way with a fellow's work; one always believes in the cripples, you know. Well, this actor chanced to get hold of the script one day, fell in love with it, and put it on with Joan as his leading woman. If it had been anybody else's sketch, I'd never have known what became of her, probably. As it was, I knew nothing of it until I got back from the coast. I believe they were married very shortly after it was produced; and now they're playing it all over the country. Odd, isn't it?"

"Very," she smiled. "And so your heart wasn't broken?"

He shook his head and laughed; but a spasm of pain shot through his eyes and deceived the woman for a little time.

"And what have you been doing?" she pursued, meaning to distract him. "I mean, your work?"

"Oh, I've had an average luckless year. To begin with, Rideout fell down on his production of 'The Jade God'—the only time it ever had a chance to get over. A man named Algerson bought his contract and put it on at his stock theater in Los Angeles. That's why I went out there—to see it butchered."

"It failed?"

"Extravagantly!"

"But didn't you once have a great deal of confidence in it, Matthias?"

"Every play is a valuable property until it's produced," he answered, smiling. "This one was killed by its production. Nothing was right. It needed scenery, and what they gave it had served a decade in stock. It needed actors, and what actors were accidentally permitted to get into the cast got the wrong rôles. Finally, it needed intelligent stage direction, and that was supplied by the leading man, whose idea of a good play is one in which he speaks everybody's lines as well as his own. Then they rewrote most of the best scenes and botched them horribly."

"You couldn't stop them?"

"When I attempted to interfere, I was told civilly to go to thunder. Under my contract, I could have stopped them; but that meant suing out an injunction, which in turn meant putting up a bond, and—I didn't have the money."

"I'm so sorry, Matthias!"

"Oh, it's all in the game. I learned something, at least. But the greatest harm it did me was to sap the faith of managers here. One man—Wylie—who was under contract to produce my 'To-morrow's People,' paid me a forfeit of five hundred dollars rather than run the risk after 'The Jade God' died."

"And so you lost both plays?"

"Oh, no; I still have 'To-morrow's People,' and only a short time ago I signed up with a manager who isn't afraid of his shadow. We'll put it on next autumn."

"And you believe in that, too?"

"I know it will go," he asserted with level confidence. "It's only a question of intelligence at the producing end—and I've arranged to get that."

"And meanwhile—you've been working hard?"

"Oh"—he spread out his hands—"one

doesn't stop, you know. It's too interesting." Then he laughed again. "But, you see, you flatter a fellow into talking his head off about himself. Forgive me, and let me do a little cross-examining. How are you? What have you been doing? You—you know, Venetia—you're looking more exquisitely pretty than ever."

And so she was—more strangely lovely than ever in all the long span of their friendship; with a deeper radiance in her face, a clearer, more translucent pallor; in her eyes a splendor that lent new dignity to their violet-shadowed mystery.

"I'm glad of that," she said quietly. She folded listless hands in her lap, her eyes seeking the distance. "I'm going to be very happy, I think."

He looked up sharply. She was going to be very happy? What did she mean by that?

That she wasn't happy now, he could well understand; that Marbridge was behaving badly was a matter rather too broadly published by the very publicity of his methods. Marriage had not been permitted to interfere—at least, not after his return from Europe—with the ordinary tenor of his bachelor ways. Matthias himself had seen him not infrequently in theaters and restaurants, but only once in company with Venetia. Most often he had been dancing attendance upon a Mrs. Cardrow—she who had given her lips to Matthias, thinking him Marbridge, that long-ago night at Tanglewood. She was said to be stage-struck, and Marbridge was rumored to be deeply though quietly involved in the financing of theatrical enterprises of a certain order.

Certainly, then, Venetia must know what everybody knew, and must be unhappy in that knowledge; but now she was so calmly confident that she was "going to be happy"! Could she mean divorce?

And then in a flash he understood. The woman who had stopped him was not of Venetia's caste. She was probably a nurse; and Venetia afoot instead of in her limousine—

She turned her eyes to his, smiling with a certain diffident, sweet sedateness.

"You didn't know, Matthias?"

He shook his head, looking away.

"But you have guessed?"

"Yes," he replied in a low voice.

Her hand fell lightly over his for a single instant.

"Then be glad for me, Matthias," she begged gently. "It's—it's compensation."

"I understand," he said, "and I'm truly very glad. It's kind of you to—to know that I'd be glad."

"It changes everything," she said pensively. "All my world is changed, and I am a new, strange woman, seeing it with new eyes. I have learned so much—and in so short a time—I can hardly believe it. To think, it's not a year since that time at Tanglewood!"

"Please!" he pleaded brokenly.

"Oh, I didn't mean to hurt you, Matthias; but that's what I wanted to talk to you about. You won't mind, when you understand—as I have learned to understand. I tell you, I'm altogether another woman. Marriage is like learning to live in a foreign land, but motherhood is another world. I find it difficult to realize the Venetia of a year ago; she's like some strange creature I once knew but never quite understood. And yet, little as I understood her, I can make excuses for her. I know her impulses were not bad. I know, better than she knew, that she loved you, Matthias."

"You must not say that, Venetia!"

"But it's true, my dear, most true," she insisted in her voice of gentle magic. "The rest—" The magic left her voice, and it was harsh and broken when she resumed. "The rest was just madness—the sort of madness that some men have the power to—to rouse in women. It's a deadly power, very terrible, and those who have it use it as carelessly as children playing with matches and gunpowder!"

"Oh, I understand, Venetia, I understand. Don't—"

"No, let me tell you. I've got to, Matthias. I've had this in my heart to tell you for so long. You must be kind to me, this once, and listen. You must know that I loved you then when I—ran to you—threw myself into your arms—made you ask me to marry you, and promised I would, and—and thought that I was safe from him because of my promise. But I didn't know myself or him. He seemed able to make his will my law so easily—so strangely. Even when I ran away with him, I knew that happiness could never come of it. It was the madness—I couldn't help myself. And then—ah, but I have paid for my madness—many times over!"

For the moment Matthias couldn't trust

himself to speak. The woman bent forward to gain a glimpse of his half-averted face, and searched it anxiously with her haunted eyes.

"You do understand, Matthias? You forgive me?"

"There isn't any question of forgiveness," he said. "And I always understood—half-way. You know that—you must have known it, or you couldn't have said what you have—to me."

The woman laughed a little, tender, broken laugh.

"I am so glad!" she said softly. "Perhaps it's wrong; but you've made me a little happier. I have needed so desperately some one to confess to—some one on whose sympathy I could count. And—Matthias—the only one in the world was you." She rose, holding out both hands to him; and as he took them and held them tight he saw that her lovely eyes were wide and dim with tears. "You've proved my faith in you," she said. "My true gentleman—my knight without fear and without reproach!"

He bent his head to her hands, but before his lips could touch them, very gently she drew them away, and turned and left him.

Bareheaded and wondering, for a long time Matthias stood staring at the spot where, in company with the nurse, Venetia had disappeared.

XXXVII

JOAN had been in New York for six weeks, during which period, questioning the reaction upon her temperament, she had consistently avoided her family. By degrees the discomforts of her cheap hotel life, the loneliness of days uncheered by friendly faces, together with the depression due to her fruitless efforts to obtain new employment on the stage, wrought her up to a pitch of such daring that she turned once more toward the back parlor at Mme. Duprat's.

It was an unpleasantly warm and humid afternoon close upon the 1st of June. Matthias was working furiously against time, carpentering an old play in which some unwary manager had evinced a languid interest—offering to consider it seriously if certain changes were made. He was in haste to be rid of it, not only because he didn't like the job and disapproved soulfully of the stipulated changes, but also be-

cause he was booked for his beloved woods of Maine as soon as the revision was complete.

Naturally, then, he wasn't pleased to be warned, through the medium of a knock upon his door, of an interruption.

"Come in!" he said bruskiy, and bent again over the manuscript.

He didn't look up until he had pursued a thread of thought to the bitter end and knotted it all shipshape. And when at length he discovered a young woman in the doorway, waiting patiently, her eyes wide with apprehension, his mind was so far from any thought of Joan that at first he didn't recognize her.

But this alien presence in his study brought him to his feet quickly enough.

"I beg your pardon," said he with an uncertain bow. "You wished to see me?"

Joan shut the door then and came forward into stronger light.

"You don't remember me?" she asked wistfully.

"Of course I do," he said, with a nervous laugh. "But I wasn't—ah—expecting you, exactly—you understand."

"Yes," she answered in a subdued and uneasy tone.

For a moment or two both were silent in constraint; she watching him closely under cover of a semblance of embarrassment, he genuinely astonished beyond coherent thought of action. Then, recovering, he asked her if she wouldn't sit down.

"But I'm afraid I'm in your way," she said doubtfully, as she sank into the old easy chair.

"Oh, no!" he replied quickly, and betrayed his insincerity by an apologetic glance toward his manuscript, together with a hasty sweep of fingers through his hair.

"Yes, I am; so I sha'n't stay," she said, settling herself comfortably. "I only want a minute of your time, if you don't mind."

"Mind? Certainly not!"

She looked down, as if she found it hard to meet his honest and questioning eyes.

"I was only afraid you might—after what's happened—"

"Please don't let that worry you," he said quickly, fumbling with a cigarette.

"But I was very foolish and—and unkind, I know. I—I've been sorry ever since."

"Don't be," he begged, in such an odd tone that she looked swiftly up again.

Thus far everything had gone beautifully, quite as she had rehearsed the meeting before she found herself brave and desperate enough to approach him again. But this tone of his made her suddenly afraid that, after all, the scene might not be going off as swimmingly as it had promised; and she wasn't quick-witted enough to extemporize a line to counteract the threatened change in the plot.

This enabled Matthias to light his cigarette and get what he would have termed, to adopt the technical jargon of his trade in those days, "a better slant on the situation."

"Don't be," he repeated more easily. "I assure you, Miss Thursday, that so far as I'm concerned you have nothing at all to reproach yourself with."

"You mean you didn't care!" she said, almost in dismay.

He smiled, but not unkindly.

"I mean, neither of us cared, really. We both lost our heads for a time—that was all. It was all very pretty and—well, impassioned, while it lasted, but our hearts weren't really in it, and it couldn't last. You were wise enough to see that first, and—ah—you did the only thing you could decently do, when you drew out. I understood that at once."

"I was afraid you—you'd hate and despise me," she began, in a desperate attempt to regain lost ground.

"Far from it, Miss Thursday; I was grateful. I could never learn to hate or despise you, for that matter; but if you hadn't been so sensible and far-sighted the affair might have gone on until it couldn't have been remedied, and then we'd both have been terribly unhappy."

This was anything but the attitude she had fancied Matthias would adopt, and she saw that her cause was now worse than forlorn—it was lost; that is, unless it could be saved by the heroic measure of her predetermined last effort.

She fumbled in her bag and found his ring.

"Perhaps you're right," she said with a little sigh. "What I really came for was to return—this."

Matthias started and said quite truthfully:

"Oh, I'd forgotten!" He took it from her extended hand and tossed it carelessly to his work-table, where it lay atop a bundle of manuscript and seemed cynically

to wink at its late possessor. "Thank you," he added.

Because he wasn't looking at the moment, Joan permitted her lips to tremble. It was becoming a more painful scene than she had anticipated. Deep in her heart she had always nursed a secret hope that Matthias would insist on her retaining the ring. It wouldn't be out of keeping with his easy-going and generous nature, as she had learned to know it.

But he seemed to think that she ought to be glad thus to disburden her conscience, without greatly modifying her indebtedness. Thus reminded of the hundred and fifty dollars that she had never earned, she wondered uncomfortably if it would advance her cause to offer to return it as well. This temptation she resisted. If Matthias mentioned it, she could, of course, remember, with business of surprise and embarrassment, and insist on repaying him; but if he didn't, she could without great mental distress carry the debt a little longer—though as soon as she was drawing a salary again, she would of course hasten to cancel the obligation.

It was true that she could have spared the money, for Quard's money-belt had yielded the surprising sum of nine hundred dollars, all of which she had kept—principally because she had been afraid to return any part of it. As long as Quard believed he had been robbed on the Barbary Coast, it was all right; but she feared he would be quite capable of causing her arrest if he suspected that she had completed the spoliation begun by the stick-up men of San Francisco. But though she wasn't at present in financial straits, there was no telling how long her present run of ill-luck would last; and a hundred and fifty dollars in hand would enable her to hold out that much longer.

She concluded not to refer to the money just yet.

"I'm sorry I was so long bringing it back," she resumed with an artificial manner. "I meant to always—and then I'd keep putting it off. You know how it is when you're on the road; one never seems to have any time to oneself."

"It's quite all right, Miss Thursday," Matthias assured her gravely.

She grew sensitive to his patience.

"But I mustn't keep you from your work," she said, rising. "You—you knew I was working, didn't you?"

"I heard," he evaded, "in a roundabout way, that you were playing in vaudeville." She nodded vigorously.

"Yes; I've been all over with a sketch called 'The Lie.' It's still playing in the West, I believe."

"You've left it, then?"

She ached to know if he had learned of her marriage. And then she thought he could not possibly have heard about it; it had been so quiet, and nobody had known except the immediate members of the company. She wondered the more if it would make any difference in his attitude toward her if he did know.

"Oh, yes," she said briskly, to disguise her momentary hesitancy, "I left it the week we played Frisco. The star and I didn't seem able to get along, somehow."

"But still you did manage to agree with him pretty well, I understand?"

"What do you mean?"

Did he really know, then?

"Why"—Matthias smiled—"you stuck with the sketch for several months, didn't you?"

Her confidence returned.

"Oh, yes, of course; but it was getting too much for me all the time. So I quit and came back to look for another engagement. I—I don't suppose you know of anything?"

"Not at present, I'm afraid."

"If you hear of anything, it would be awful good of you to let me know. 'Care of the *Mirror*' will always reach me."

"I sha'n't forget."

And still she lingered.

"They say Arlington's making a lot of productions next fall."

"Yes?" he said, puzzled to surmise whither this was leading.

"I was wondering if you'd mind putting in a good word for me."

"I'd be glad to, but I don't know Mr. Arlington."

"But you know Mr. Marbridge, and they say he's Arlington's silent partner."

Matthias colored slightly and looked uncomfortable.

"I'm not sure that that's so," he said. "And—well, to tell the truth, Marbridge and I don't hit it off very well. I'm afraid I couldn't influence him in any way, except perhaps to prejudice him."

"Oh!" she said blankly; and began to suspect that perhaps the two men had quarreled about her because of the obvious fascination she had exercised over Marbridge that day at Tanglewood. "I suppose I might go to see him—Mr. Marbridge—myself?"

"I'm afraid I can't advise you."

This time the finality of his tone was unmistakable, and she found no excuse for further delay.

"Well, I guess I must trot along."

She thrust out her hand with a frank and girlish gesture—with her head held arched a little to one side—recently picked up from a popular female star, and secretly practised for some time. Matthias took the proffered hand with plain diffidence, releasing it almost instantly.

"I hope I haven't disturbed you much?"

Joan went on.

"Oh, not at all!"

"It was sweet of you not—not to be unkind to me."

There was a trace of weariness in his response, as he turned to open the door for her:

"I assure you I could never be."

"Well—good-by!"

(To be concluded)

A SONG OF SUMMER

FLOWERS pass, and faces go,
And, late or soon, must fall the snow;
Night ends the longest summer day;
'Tis so, 'twas ever so.
For us, my dear—us, ever!—yea,
'Twill be as they.

'Tis an old song, yet all so new,
Fresh as the dew;
How often has this tale been told,
So strangely new, so strangely old,
Of me and you!

Richard Le Gallienne

THE STAGE

DULL TIMES IN LONDON STAGELAND

MID April finds London in the grip of an appalling play famine. Were it not for revivals and American importations, half the theaters and nearly all the music-halls might have to close.

Sir Herbert Tree found "The Happy Island" so joyless that he made haste to fall back on a reproduction of "The School for Scandal"—his second revival of the Sheridan comedy within five years.

Ethel Irving, who took over the Globe from Charles Frohman on April 1, has already discarded "Vanity," a new venture, for her old reliable "Lady Frederick." Gerald Du Maurier, after a season in "Doormats," uses the excitement about spies as an excuse for brushing the dust off Sardou's "Diplomacy."

At the Comedy, on April 3, Kenneth Douglas—who played the hero in the long London run of "Ready Money"—put on "The Inferior Sex," which was done in New York some time since by Maxine



GERTIE MILLAR, LEADING WOMAN IN "THE MARRIAGE MARKET," THE NEW MUSICAL COMEDY AT DALY'S IN LONDON

From her latest photograph by Rita Martin, London

Elliott. On the 19th he took it off again, replacing it with Galsworthy's "Strife," first performed in London some three years since. Meanwhile Violet Vanbrugh has gone back to Clyde Fitch's "Woman in the Case," and Hilda Trevelyan to one of Pinero's very early products, "The School-

served that the latter was just now so healthy because the public had discovered the play to be more important than the actor. He added that London used to be the theatrical oracle, but that it had now become more of a clearing-house, for many of the best plays of the past year were not



MARIE LÖHR, WHO WAS LEADING WOMAN WITH GERALD DU MAURIER
IN "DOORMATS"

From her latest photograph by the Dover Street Studios, London

mistress." When I remind you that mid April in the London theaters may be said to correspond to mid September in New York, you will understand what this dearth of novelties represents in the stageland of the West End.

At a recent dinner of the Playgoers' Club, in coupling the name of Gerald Du Maurier with a toast to the drama, a speaker ob-

written by Londoners or in London. In his reply Mr. Du Maurier declared that, although he was continually hearing about the "new movement" in drama, he had for his part been unable to detect any, unless it were rag-time.

"Milestones" is still running at the Royalty, where it started on March 5 of last year. Another play of Arnold Ben-



MADELEINE SEYMOUR AS LINDA IN "THE GIRL ON THE FILM," AT THE LONDON GAIETY

From a photograph by Rita Martin, London



GLADYS COOPER, WHO IS DORA IN THE SUCCESSFUL REVIVAL OF SARDOU'S "DIPLOMACY"
AT WYNDHAM'S THEATER IN LONDON

From her latest photograph by Foulsham & Banfield, London

nett's is making talk at the Kingsway—"The Great Adventure," as he calls his dramatization of "Buried Alive," his story of a famous artist who posed as his own valet. The play makes many departures from the book, and introduces several new characters. After all's said and done, it is scarcely a play, but rather a series of fascinating character studies. Of real movement there is little, and the curtains are unexpected—which is as much as to say that they are never dramatic.

And yet it is quite on the cards that the piece will have a good run, capitally acted as it is by Henry Ainley as the artist, and by Wish Wynne, recruited from the varieties, as *Jane Cannot*. There lurks just that subtlety about the points that causes the people in front to pat themselves on the back for being smart enough to appreciate them; and once you get an audience into this mood, you are sure of good subsequent houses—if you have money enough to hold on till the mouth-to-mouth advertising has had time to get in its work.

The public received good measure in "The Great Adventure." There are four acts, each of them played in two scenes. In this connection I noted a London innovation which has not yet reached New York. Lapses of time in the action of the piece are indicated not only on the programs, but also by an electric-lighted tablet which pops up for an instant in the darkened house just behind the band-leader's music-stand.

Cyril Maude seems to have a special fondness for old men rôles—a penchant that is not common with actors of prominence. Last year I saw him as a bishop in "Love—and What Then?" Now I find him in the title part of "The Headmaster," where he appears as



VIOLET VANBRUGH, WHO RECENTLY REVIVED CLYDE FITCH'S
"WOMAN IN THE CASE" IN LONDON

From her latest photograph by Rita Martin, London

the father of a grown daughter. As a matter of fact, in the sort of character parts which supply Mr. Maude with his best *métier* in acting, it is not at all necessary for him to appear on the shady side of

ture termagant mistaking a man's reference to a younger girl, whom he loves, as a proposal to herself. 'Tis pity indeed that so able an actor as Mr. Maude cannot find something in the military line as well suit-



ALICE CRAWFORD, WHO IS IN THE LONDON PRODUCTION OF "BOUGHT AND PAID FOR"

From a photograph by Rita Martin, London

forty, despite the fact that his own daughter Margery is now his leading woman.

Truth to tell, although "The Headmaster" has been running for over a dozen weeks, it is poor stuff. I do not know how Edward Knoblauch, of "Kismet" fame, came to be concerned in its writing. The plot hinges on that musty device of a ma-

ed to him as "The Second in Command" or "The Flag Lieutenant."

Apropos of poor business at the theaters, London is at this writing discussing Pintero's revolutionary suggestion of a remedy—nothing more nor less than permission to smoke in the auditoriums, as is done at the music-halls. It is noticeable, if not sur-



PAULINE CHASE, WHO HAS BEEN TOURING ENGLAND IN "PETER PAN"

From her latest photograph by Rita Martin, London



GWENDOLIN BROGDEN, WHO IS IN "THE GIRL ON THE FILM," AT THE LONDON GAIETY

From a photograph by Rita Martin, London

prising, that those managers who disagree with him are just the few who happen to have winners on bill-boards.

From the correspondence this discussion has brought to the newspapers, I note that there are other things at which theatergoers grumble besides the refusal of the County Council to allow smoking without a music-hall license. There are protests against the charge of sixpence (twelve cents) for a program, and at the lack of another three inches on the pit seats. It's bad enough to stand in line for hours in order to get the front row in the half-crown section

without finding that the lady's coiffure in the half-guinea stall just ahead of you is just high enough to cut off your view.

There are others, too, who complain about having to stand in line for admission to the pit—though the "cue" is a time-honored institution in London—and who plead that all seats should be booked in advance.

A REALLY GAY GAIETY GIRL

Let me turn from this record of British discontent to comment on a theater where prosperity undisturbed appears to reign,

consonant with its title—the Gaiety. The paucity of new material at home has compelled George Edwardes to go abroad for his latest offering, "The Girl on the Film," produced April 5, but this musical farce from the German has been wholly Anglicized by the old Gaiety standby, James T. Tanner.

With picture theaters—cinemas, they call them in London—on all sides, it seems odd that no one has hitherto thought of using the craze as the basis for the plot of a drama. In "The Girl on the Film" we see, first, the Vioscope offices in London; next, a rural background in Lincolnshire, where we watch the taking of pictures for "Napoleon and the Miller's Daughter"; and lastly the display of these same pictures on a screen at a Savoy Hotel soirée. In the second act, a Lincolnshire miller, who is supposed to have gone up to London, unexpectedly appears on the scene, to discover a squad of soldiers wearing a foreign uniform and training their guns on his veranda, against which the condemned spy has been stationed. Convinced that his predictions of a German invasion have come true, he calls for his farm hands, who rush on with spades and pitchforks to the ruination of the Napoleonic atmosphere. In fact, we never do see the film through to the finish, as in the last scene a man in the audience recognizes his daughter in the heroine and calls for the exhibit to cease.

The music, of which there is none too much, is light and easy to whistle. It is the work of three German composers, while George Grossmith and Emmy Wehlen head a competent cast, including the old Gaiety favorite, Connie Ediss, but excluding that other Gaiety standby, Edmund Payne, now gone into vaudeville. It goes without saying that the production is adequate in every respect. Indeed, British audiences are so accustomed to sumptuous mounting that they never applaud for scenery, as people sometimes do in New York.

"OPEN WINDOWS" MAY CLOSE A THEATER

Sir George Alexander is not doing any too well with "Open Windows" at the St. James, although in this very serious play by A. E. W. Mason both the eminent actor-manager and Irene Vanbrugh do some of the very best work I have ever seen from either of them. Nowadays, when the public can get so much of women with a present, both in novels and the daily

press, people seem inclined to turn the cold shoulder on the lady with a past when offered to them across the footlights. And *Cynthia Herrick's* past is twenty years back, when, after having repeatedly rejected *Herrick*, she suddenly accepted him on discovering that she was to have a child by another man. This latter is a character who appears to have been suggested by Dr. Cook, of north pole pretensions, as he has gone away to climb some "highest peak" and doesn't, but only tells about it.

All this, you must remember, is recounted twenty years afterward, thus contravening a principle just laid down by Charles Frohman, recently arrived from New York:

Playwriting in Europe is suffering from a plague of words. The eye is now the chief organ to appeal to in the theater. This plague of words is the paralysis of playwriting. People go to the theater to see first and to hear afterward.

In "Open Windows" you must listen carefully to what is said in the early scenes, or you won't understand what is done later; although it may be added that very little is done in the piece at any time.

Far more novel in theme than the *pièce de résistance* of the bill is the curtain-raiser to "Open Windows," written by no less eminent a hand than Sir Arthur Pinero's. "Playgoers" he calls the trifle, and classifies it as a "domestic episode." Eight people take part in the affair, which has to do with the theater as viewed by a party of servants whose mistress has sent them to the play for a treat. The outcome is that the whole lot give notice. Behind the clever lines of the piece one notes the sore heart of England's most celebrated playwright over the low esteem in which his art is held in the present Georgian era.

THAT SAME OLD GALLIC MODEL

Another farce is now bidding for favor in the same theater, the Strand, where "The Glad Eye" ran for so many months to the utter amazement of New Yorkers who had seen it fail dismally as "The Zebra." A novel idea is at the back of the new venture, called by the same name—"The Chaperon"—as the comedy which opened the Maxine Elliott Theater.

In the latter case, the word was used in its accepted sense as indicating a woman. In the Strand play the chaperon is a man whom a restaurant-keeper employs to im-

part an air of decorum when a married man wishes to entertain a friend of the other sex. The professional chaperon poses as the woman's husband, and orders the dinner—an expensive one, be sure—for which, of course, the supposed guest pays.

In the present instance, the regular chaperon has fallen ill from overeating, and a patron of the restaurant begs to be permitted to take his place for the fun of the thing. What is supposed to be fun for the audience begins when an elderly M. P. invites a young actress to dine, and his wife suddenly appears on the scene. The chaperon and the actress are introduced to her as Mr. and Mrs. Jones, political acquaintances of her husband. Loyal to his interests, she invites them to visit her in the country. As there must be a second act, they decide to go; and then, to provide a third, the motor that brings them from the station breaks down and they have no way of getting back to town that night. It will be seen that as soon as it gets beyond the opening situation, the piece follows the old lines of the French farces that went out when the telephone came in.

Louis Meyer, the enterprising manager of the Strand, who has a finger in variously flavored theatrical offerings, tells me that he is to read "The Poor Little Rich Girl," with a view to presenting it in London if he finds it suitable.

"The outlook for plays here, however," he added, "is not very roseate just now. Our public prefers the music-halls. Ordinarily, when you give the people comedy, farce, or drama, you can't tell in advance whether it will suit them or not; but at present it seems safe to guess that whatever you offer them, they won't like it."

THE AMERICAN INVASION

From my observations since my arrival in the British capital, Mr. Meyer would appear to be perfectly right. The music-halls are packed, not for the ballets that used to be their most attractive features, but for *revues*, so called. The list of these includes "All the Winners," at the Empire; "Eightpence a Mile," which has just replaced "Kill That Fly" at the Alhambra; "Hullo Rag-time," mostly American, at the Hippodrome, where it has been entertaining crowds for months; and now the biggest sensation of all, "Come Over Here," at the London Opera House, for-

merly Hammerstein's, which is filled night after night and at three matinées a week for the first time in its history.

The two big sensations in "Come Over Here" have already been seen in New York, one of them so long ago that we have ceased to talk about it. This is the disappearing act into the Hippodrome tank, introduced some half-dozen years ago. At the London Opera House twelve girls march down two and two into the lake, on which ducks are swimming, and the audiences do not seem to have heard of the compressed air invention by which the thing is accomplished. In the first act, the race between the motor-car and the railway train, exploited during last season at New York's Winter Garden, aroused thrills of amazement.

Just what the title of "Come Over Here" means I cannot state, though it may refer to the scores of pretty American girls who have come over to appear in the chorus, and the numerous "turns" borrowed from beyond the Atlantic. There is our old friend the "Yama Yama Girl," the statuary group of the dying gladiator out of the Weber & Fields repertoire, the scene that shifts around while the girls are marching up and down the staircase, the giving away of all the show's secrets, à la Al Jolson, by a black-face comedian, besides the two big sensations already mentioned.

Although "Hullo Ragtime" set London's feet tapping to syncopated tunes, I believe that "Come Over Here" will have a longer run than the Hippodrome piece. Not only does it possess rag-time and pretty girls, to which ingredients the taste of West End audiences seems to run just now, but it has the big scenic effects that "Hullo Rag-time" lacks. In the latter, the American contingent includes Ethel Levey, vastly improved in her work since she left New York; Shirley Kellogg, fetchingly beautiful and of bubbling spirits; and Bonita, the echoes of whose "Hitchy Koo" her public are loath to let die. Miss Levey sings "Waiting for the Robert E. Lee," and Miss Kellogg, with the aid of the calcium man, makes numerous couples uncomfortable by wandering up and down the Sumurun platform and singing pointedly, if a little ungrammatically, to the male half:

"Who are you with to-night?"

If I have devoted what may seem an undue amount of space to this rag-time rage, it is only what British audiences are doing

with their time. The Hippodrome *revue* has been running to packed houses since December 23, and the people in front sit apathetic while the humorous turns are on, only waking up to hearty applause for "coon songs" and the parade of pretty girls. Small wonder is it that the London newspapers are filled with articles on the lamentable state to which the drama has declined.

A GROUP OF WEST END STAGES

A bright gleam in the darkness of London theaterland is the success attending the farewell season of Forbes-Robertson at Drury Lane. I looked in at a matinée of "Hamlet," and good it was to see the vast spaces of England's historic playhouse crowded with admirers of the best living exponent of the part which is the actor's highest goal. "The Passing of the Third Floor Back," "The Light That Failed," "Othello," "The Merchant of Venice," "Antony and Cleopatra," and "Mice and Men" form the repertoire for this notable engagement of three months, which has been successful in every way. It is to be followed in the autumn by a final tour of the States, when the star, in the same round of rôles, will be supported, as he is at Drury Lane, by his American wife, Gertrude Elliott.

Arthur Bouchier, once leading man at the New York Daly's under the famous Augustin, has been managing his own theater in London, the Garrick, for several years. Two seasons ago he introduced "Kismet" there. At this writing he is on the eve of appearing in a play by Baron Rothschild, called, appropriately enough, "Cræsus." Meanwhile Mr. Bouchier has been enacting a good-humored priest in the comedy from E. Temple Thurston's novel, "The Greatest Wish." An altogether engaging priest he makes, too, and if the play itself be a bit artificial, *Father O'Leary* is deliciously human. Farren Soutar, son of the famous Nellie Farren, and lately in musical comedy, has passed into the field of the straight drama, and gives a good account of himself as the sea lover who is thought to have deserted the priest's adopted daughter.

Two months measured the West End career of Marie Tempest's latest vehicle, "The Handful," written by another of the many new men whose names are seen on current London playbills—where, alas,

very few remain for long. William Gordon Edwards endeavored to shirk being brought to book for his shortcomings by calling his play "an irresponsible comedy," but that surely does not absolve him from his sins in construction, which are many—so many, in fact, that after the piece had been running some time it was reduced from four acts to three in an endeavor to draw the action more closely together.

By an odd coincidence the basic idea of "The Handful" is somewhat akin both to that of "Years of Discretion"—which Charles Frohman is to do in London in the autumn—and to that of "The Lady from Oklahoma," which had such a brief career in New York last spring. Marie Tempest, the mother of a grown boy and girl, insists on flirting so desperately with all the young men in her entourage that both *Tom* and *Joyce* bring her to book for the scandal of the thing, seeing that their father is still alive, and insist that she shall be content to seem middle-aged as well as be it. Miss Tempest is at her best in such a rôle, and one senses that the part must have been written for her.

There are some excellent examples of repartee in the lines, to achieve which the modern British playwright seems willing to sacrifice all else. Applause for a well-turned epigram seems to mean more to him than a well-constructed plot. Hence the many short runs, for your man in the street and his wife or sweetheart, as the case may be, want to be absorbed by a story of culminating interest rather than dazzled by flashes of wit, however brilliant.

Miss Tempest is followed at the Prince of Wales's by Martin Harvey in a novel revival of "The Taming of the Shrew." Whether the success of "The Yellow Jacket" at the Duke of York's inspired the idea, I am not prepared to state; but Mr. Harvey—whose greatest hit was *Sydney Carton* in "The Only Way"—presents the Shakespeare comedy in what he claims is the original fashion. There is practically no scenery, and *Christopher Sly*—for whose delectation all that follows the induction is supposed to take place—is seated down in front.

Apropos of Oriental plays, "The Typhoon," after seven weeks at the Haymarket, moves to the Queen's to make room for another American importation, "Within the Law," revised for British audiences by Frederick Fenn and Arthur Wimperis.

Of course, there will be an English cast, headed by Edyth Goodall, who originated the heroine in "Hindle Wakes."

Of the other American plays, "Get-Rich-Quick Wallingford" ran from January 14 to May 24 at the Queen's, but "Bought and Paid For," at the New, only lasted from March 12 to May 24. Nor do I anticipate an extended career for "The Seven Sisters," from the Hungarian, played in America two years ago by Charles Cherry, and recently put up in London at the unlucky Savoy.

CHARLES HAWTREY AND H. V. ESMOND

One can but wonder at the British public's faithfulness to its favorites on beholding the long run of so frail a vehicle as "General John Regan," with which Charles Hawtreys has been holding forth at the Apollo for these sixteen weeks or more. Written by George A. Birmingham, author of "Spanish Gold" and other novels of Irish life, there is about enough material in the comedy to furnish forth a twenty-minute sketch on the vaudeville boards, but here we have it spread out over three acts, plus the usual curtain-raiser which the West End theaters throw in to please the habitués of the pit.

An American tourist of wealth from South Bend, Indiana, bulks large in the plot, which is built about a man who has no existence except in the imagination of this Western visitor, who wants to know why Ballymoy has erected no memorial to her gallant son. Hawtreys's part is that of a glib-spoken dispensary doctor, who leads the whole place by the nose, and acquires a marked-down monument to unveil in the last act. A great deal of time is wasted over the alleged British ignorance of tunes, so that "Wearing of the Green" may be played by the town band with no fear of its being recognized as a national anthem of the Home Rule element in Ireland.

Mr. Hawtreys, who has taken on flesh to an alarming degree since I saw him last, does all that his admirers expect of him; and a clever actress in the person of Cathleen Nesbit accomplishes wonders with a part whose lines are mostly monosyllables. I shall be glad to see Charles Hawtreys, who scored so heavily in "The Message from Mars," in something more worthy of him. I trust he will find it in "The Middle of Next Week," the new farce that Somerset Maugham has just completed for his use.

More fortunate than Hawtreys, H. V. Es-

mond can write his own plays. His latest, a farcical comedy, "Eliza Comes to Stay," naturally prompted the critics to say that it might not emulate its title; but produced at the Criterion on February 12, it is at this writing setting a good pace toward the hundred mark.

There is nothing strikingly original about the idea of a bachelor expecting to be saddled with the child of a deceased chum, and then finding that the charge he has promised to cherish is a grown woman; but Mr. Esmond has contrived to clothe his heroine in the garments that make for success. In other words, *Eliza*, taking a leaf out of her aunt's experience, deliberately dons the sort of attire calculated to make a lone woman safe, adding to its severe lines spectacles for her nose and a bun for the back of her head. The result is sufficiently appalling when she arrives on the scene, and at the sight the *Hon. Sandy Verrall* collapses and flees to Paris. He returns in a month's time to find the moth transformed into a butterfly, as any seasoned playgoer knew she would be.

It seems to me that this illustrates a difference between the English public taste and the American. In the United States we like to have our curiosity piqued, to be unable to guess the outcome, and thus enjoy the thrill of suspense. In England, apparently, the reader, and the man in the stalls as well, love to find a loophole through which they can see the end from the beginning. Then, when the dénouement is reached, they can figuratively pat themselves on the back and say:

"Ah, how clever we are! We knew it would turn out like this."

Hence I doubt if "Eliza Comes to Stay" would tarry as long on Broadway as it has in the West End. Mr. Esmond, I may add, has been very gallant in giving his wife and leading woman, Eva Moore, a much better part than he has served out to himself. And capitably does she play it. I liked his own manner of acting, too. It is straightaway, with none of the drawling mannerisms so often seen in the portrayal of rôles depicting the London men about town.

Several of Mr. Esmond's plays have been seen in America, notably "When We Were Twenty-One," presented in New York some years ago by Maxine Elliott and Nat Goodwin.

Matthew White, Jr.

FINANCIAL DEPARTMENT

ANNUITIES AS INVESTMENTS

INQUIRIES have come to us in regard to the annuity as an investment, and particularly as to how it compares with holdings of good stocks and bonds. An opportunity is thus afforded to explain a comparatively little known form of employing money in a safe way to meet a special requirement.

In the United States the annuity is an adjunct of life insurance. With the exception of the savings-banks of Massachusetts, which are empowered to issue policies and pay annuities, it is sold entirely by insurance companies.

The annuity, however, is the very opposite of life insurance. In life insurance, a man pays a sum of money—called a premium—to get a larger sum for some beneficiary at his death. He must—with the old-line policies, at least—die to win. With an annuity, on the other hand, he pays down a lump sum to secure a fixed income for the remainder of his life. He must live to win.

In life insurance, the companies seek the best risks—that is, the healthiest people; in annuities, a poor risk is the most profitable for the company because the annuity ceases at death, and all the money that the annuitant has paid in belongs to the company. In this respect it is the reverse of a bond or a share of stock, which becomes part of a deceased holder's estate. It is the one form of investment on which the owner cannot realize to make another investment.

Why, then, should any man or woman buy an annuity? It is essentially an investment for older people, because it is a form of insurance against hardship during the declining years.

There are many forms of the annuity, but the four principal ones are known as the immediate, the deferred, the two-life, and the survivorship. These titles relate to the period in which the income is paid.

An immediate annuity is what the name

implies—that is, the income is paid as soon as the policy is bought. The companies claim that it is difficult to make this business profitable, because the holders of such policies live long. Yet there are instances to the contrary, as was the case with an Englishman who paid nearly half a million dollars for an annuity of fifty-five thousand dollars, and died the second year after the policy was issued.

Sixty per cent of the annuities in force in the United States are immediate. A man aged sixty can buy an annuity for twenty thousand dollars, which will yield him \$1,734.40 each year for the rest of his life. If he invested this money in gilt-edged bonds, paying four per cent, he would only get eight hundred dollars a year. But there is this difference—if he died the second year after he bought the annuity, his principal of twenty thousand dollars would be wiped out; if he died the second year after he bought the bonds, his estate would have what they could bring in the market.

There is no good reason why the average man with good and steady earning-power should take an annuity; but people in speculative callings find it very prudent to do so. A bookmaker, for example, once went into the office of a leading New York life insurance company and laid down twenty-five thousand dollars in cash, saying:

"I cleaned this up to-day, and I want to buy an annuity with it. I am liable to be broke next month, and I should like to have a nest-egg."

The immediate annuity may be employed in various interesting ways. Sometimes it is bought by a man who wants to make provision for the old age of a faithful servant. For five thousand dollars you can get an annuity of five hundred dollars, to begin at the annuitant's sixty-fifth birthday and continue for the rest of his life. Again, some people make bequests of annuities instead of lump sums. This prevents the principal from being dissipated by extravagance or bad investment.

NOTE—All matter in this department was written before the end of May.

Some straight life insurance policies partake of the nature of an annuity for the beneficiary, the insurance being paid in semimonthly or quarterly instalments during several years after the death of the insured.

The deferred annuity is effective at the end of a given time. For instance, a man aged thirty-five years may be making a good wage, but his income depends upon his keeping steadily at his employment. He wants to make provision for the time when through ill-health or accident he may be unable to work. By making twenty annual payments of \$421 each he can get an annual income of one thousand dollars, beginning when he is fifty-five and a half years of age, and continuing until the end of his life.

A two-life annuity is based on the lives of two persons, usually a man and his wife. This, of course, costs more to buy. If the husband, let us say, is fifty-five and the wife fifty, they can, by the payment of \$17,651 down, receive an income of one thousand dollars a year as long as either of them lives.

The survivorship annuity also concerns two persons. The person making the investment is called the nominator; the beneficiary is the annuitant. To obtain the benefits of the policy, the annuitant must survive the nominator. If he should die first, the policy ceases and all the money paid in goes to the company.

A policy of this kind is sometimes bought by a son to provide for a parent, or others dependent on him, in case of his sudden or premature death. For instance, a man aged twenty-five pays \$145.30 a year as long as he lives. His mother is named as annuitant. Should he die, she will receive an income of one thousand dollars annually for the remainder of her life.

A striking fact about the purchase prices of annuities is that the rate for women is a little higher than for men. The records of the companies show that female annuitants live longer than men. An English banker once said:

"Never sell life annuities to old women! They wither, but they never die."

When you come to sum up the advantages of the annuity you find that for certain purposes—principally safeguarding old age against financial hardship and insuring income in a speculative calling—they are admirable. In buying them, one should deal

only with long-established companies of reputation and proved integrity.

THE TELEPOST IN COURT

IN restraining the Telepost in the use of the name "Metropolitan Telephone and Telegraph Company," under which the enterprise has been masquerading, the Appellate Division of the New York Supreme Court recently delivered an opinion which goes far to explain why the fond anticipations of the company's shareholders have never been realized.

Readers who have followed our numerous references to the Telepost Company will recall that shortly before the arrest of the leading officers of the Sterling Debenture Corporation, on a charge of fraudulent use of the mails in selling stock of the Oxford Linen Mills Company, the Telepost went through the form of severing relations with its old-time fiscal agent. Finding its own shares no longer salable, it organized a paper company, the Metropolitan Telephone and Telegraph Company. The latter proceeded to offer at par bonds secured by nothing more valuable than Telepost stock. This has a nominal value of ten dollars, but it is quoted at about a dollar a share.

The title selected for the paper company was that of the original telephone company of New York, whose property was acquired by the New York Telephone Company, a successor corporation. The old concern has bonds still outstanding, which are very high-class securities, selling for more than one thousand dollars apiece. The New York Telephone Company brought suit to restrain the promoters of the Telepost from using the name, contending that it was employed for the purpose of deceiving the public into buying bonds of little or no value under the impression that they were the gilt-edged issues of the old Metropolitan Telephone and Telegraph Company.

In sustaining this view, the Appellate Division said:

The papers do not disclose any and we are unable to conceive of any reason except a fraudulent and reprehensible one for the adoption by the defendants of the name under which they have incorporated. The name is not fairly descriptive of any business in which they are engaged or propose to engage.

They in fact do no business, and are apparently organized only for the purpose of issuing securities as subsidiaries or auxiliaries

of a company proposing to build a projected line of telegraph between New York and Chicago. Any other name would have served any honest purpose equally well, and many could be thought of which would be more descriptive of the declared purposes of organization.

The case, therefore, presents strong reason for the interposition of equity not only to redress the wrong done to the plaintiffs, or some of them, but to prevent a continuation of a palpable fraud upon the public.

The Telepost and its indicted friend and fiscal agent, the Sterling Debenture Corporation, on numerous occasions during the last three years, in pamphlets, circulars, and letters, have assailed MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE for its exposures of their project. Nothing that we have said, however, about their stock-selling activities and the studied misrepresentation of their scheme compares with the characterization given by the Appellate Division of the New York Supreme Court.

Six years have passed since the Sterling Debenture Corporation, in one of its stock-selling circulars, announced that a contract had been awarded for the construction of

the alleged New York-Chicago Telepost line. Stock to the amount of more than three million dollars has been sold in the meanwhile, additional sums have been borrowed on sub-companies, and an effort has been made to sell bonds; but the line has not been built, and no accounting has been made of expenditures. We should think that this situation, taken with the views expressed by the court on the character of the sale of the projected telephone company bonds, would arouse the inspectors of the United States Post-Office Department to activity.

It is strange that any of the Telepost shareholders should be content with plausible excuses and mendacious tales of persecutions by the "Telephone Trust." Some of them have been chipping in money for years, never asking for an account of it. In their adherence to the proposition, and in their ready acceptance of the reports of "progress," they remind us of nothing so much as the patient donkey, plodding on and on after the wisp of straw suspended before its nose, which it is destined never to attain.

ANSWERS TO CORRESPONDENTS.

TO OUR CORRESPONDENTS

We cannot undertake to answer inquiries by letter. We have hitherto endeavored to do so in all cases when a reply by mail was requested, but the task has become so heavy that we can continue it no longer. Questions about matters of sufficient general interest will be answered in this department with as little delay as possible. Letters of inquiry should be addressed to MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE (Financial Department), and as evidence of good faith correspondents must give their names and addresses.

UNITED FRUIT COMPANY NOTES

I enclose circular regarding four-year notes of the United Fruit Company, and would appreciate it if you would give me your opinion of this as an investment. I have a few hundred dollars to invest for a woman relative.

I have a slight personal knowledge of the business of this concern, and while I believe it to be good I know they have suffered heavily in the last few years from tornadoes in Jamaica. The circular states that the company has no mortgage debt. I take it that the entire funded debt is made up of notes or similar obligations. Can you tell me about this?

L. W. E., Fulton, N. Y.

The United Fruit Company is an important and substantial concern which has shown great enterprise and achieved remarkable success in growing and marketing tropical fruits—a

business which in less capable or less honest hands has proved so bitterly disappointing to thousands of people who have put their money into "plantation" promotions. It owns extensive tracts in Central and South America and the West Indies. Its property has not been immune from damage by tropical storms, but its interests are widely distributed, it has a substantial surplus, and there is no appreciable danger of any disaster severe enough to affect its financial position.

The company has about \$9,000,000 debenture bonds outstanding, but no mortgage debt. Its stock, amounting to \$36,594,300, is listed on the Boston Stock Exchange and stands at a considerable premium, being quoted at about 160.

The notes mentioned by our correspondent are offered by a financial house of the first rank, and will be found to be precisely as represented. Of course, an industrial debenture of this sort does not measure up to the very highest investment standard. If it did, it could not be expected to yield so high a rate of interest—more than six per cent. The notes would rank well, however, as a "business man's investment."

If the "few hundred dollars" of which L. W. E. speaks are his relative's entire funds, it would not be in accordance with the best

financial practise to put them into a security of this class, for in investing a small property belonging to a woman a very high degree of safety should be the prime consideration. He does not tell us, however, just what are this investor's circumstances, and we shall therefore have to leave the final decision of the question to him.

A LIST OF LAND COMPANIES

I enclose one of the numerous letters that have come to me with reference to the Smith Valley Land Company. I should be pleased if your facilities would permit you to look into this enterprise.

E. W. M., Waterbury, Conn.

I have been urged to buy some lots of the Windsor Land and Improvement Company, on Long Island. I understand that the company is also offering both stock and bonds, either of its own or of a subsidiary concern. Furthermore, I have heard that the company does not own its property clear, but subject to a heavy mortgage indebtedness. Please advise me as to the financial standing of the company and as to the value of its lots as an investment.

G. W., New York.

A friend has requested me to investigate the financial standing of the Home Builders Company of the Amarillo Improvement Company, and I take the liberty of asking your aid. Last year he bought \$100 worth of this stock on the instalment plan, and in January he finished his payments. Soon after he received a cash dividend of \$15 and the enclosed proposition to buy more stock. He declined to do so, but his name appears in the company's literature as a satisfied purchaser.

C. T. F., Georgetown, Ky.

Some time ago I wrote you regarding the methods of some of the land companies in Florida. Recently I received the enclosed circular, which shows that a former vice-president of one of these concerns is now organizing a "protective body" on behalf of those who purchased land from the company. This is the opportunity for you to do some good, and I suggest that you get into contact with him and show these people up. They are still advertising, and still inducing Northern people to go to Florida.

J. H. H., Providence, R. I.

I have been interested in your exposures of fake companies, and would like to see more of them for the benefit of myself and others who have been the victims of some of the land companies in Boston. Some of these concerns need a probe.

Mrs. F. E., Boston.

I have a friend who has been asked to invest in the Fort Myer Land Company, of Washington. Please let me know if this would be a good and safe investment.

Mrs. M. E. P., Richmond, Va.

Would you kindly inform me what you know about the Vanderbilt Estates Company, of New York, and their lots called Vanderbilt Park?

A. R. C., Plymouth, Ind.

These letters are given as samples of the voluminous correspondence that comes to us requesting us to examine real-estate promotions of all sorts in all parts of the United States, and even in foreign countries. With every wish to help our readers, it is utterly impossible for us to undertake such a colossal task. To accomplish a tithe of it, we should need a corps of expert investigators, who would have to travel to the various promotions and make careful appraisals of their property and thorough inquiry into their methods. The expense of such a procedure would, of course, be prohibitive.

In the circumstances, we regret that it is impossible for us to give any definite information to the above correspondents, and to many others who make similar inquiries, or to tell them whether the concerns they mention are sound or not. All that we can do is to remind them of a few general principles which may be applied to the solution of some of their problems:

First, no one should put his money into land that he has never seen.

Second, no one should go into any branch of farming unless he has either a practical knowledge of the calling or a considerable amount of capital.

Third, careful inquiry and businesslike caution are highly advisable in regard to all real-estate propositions of whatever sort. Especially is this the case in regard to speculative concerns operating in suburban properties, and with tropical plantation and "farming on shares" promotions.

A DISASTROUS MEXICAN SCHEME

I enclose a report to stockholders of the International Lumber and Development Company. Can you give me any information about the suits brought against this company? Is there anything for a stockholder to do to recover any funds invested?

S. E. V., Bradford, Pa.

On April 19, in the United States District Court in Philadelphia, five officers of the International Lumber and Development Company—John R. Markley, Isaiah B. Miller, Herbert B. Stewart, William H. Armstrong, Jr., and Charles M. McMahon—were convicted of conspiracy to defraud. Other directors of the concern are under indictment and will be tried in due course.

It is said that the stock-selling efforts of this coterie resulted in the loss of six million dollars by inexperienced people. The company owned, or claimed to own—for in such cases questions of title frequently arise—a large tract in southern Mexico. Its literature gave glowing promises of vast profits to be derived from rubber, bananas, henequen, mahogany, and other products of the tropical soil. It accepted payments for its stock on the instalment plan, and it is said to have displayed special activity in securing the savings of school-teachers—which, if true, would class the fraud as a peculiarly cruel one.

This magazine printed a cautionary paragraph in regard to the International Lumber and Development Company in February of last year, and a few months earlier we published a more detailed article on "Farming in the Tropics," which conveyed an emphatic warning as to the risks inherent in all promotions of this sort. We pointed out that "a disagreeable awakening awaits many persons who have embarked their money in

Mexican rubber-plantation schemes," and added:

Why, with so many opportunities for safe and profitable investment near at hand in one's own country, so many people will persist in putting money into rubber and banana plantations, pineapple orchards, orange groves, mining schemes, and the like, thousands of miles away, is a mystery. Even under the most favorable conditions, few such undertakings are successful when conducted by foreigners in alien countries. The possibilities of swindling an investor who, in all probability, can never visit the scene of the alleged enterprise, and who would know nothing about it if he did visit it, are simply numberless.

Some actual development work was done on the International Lumber Company's land; otherwise it might not have been able to delude its stockholders for so many years. The report sent us by our correspondent, however, though framed by a committee of the directors, admits gloomy conditions. While still maintaining the inherent value of the tract, it speaks of "henequen acreage overgrown by monte," of rubber groves "retarded and injured" by weeds, of banana plantations that are "practically a failure," and of citrus fruits that cannot be marketed for lack of quick transportation. Moreover, it appears that the labor question is "a very serious proposition," and if the working of the land is to be kept up the company "may have to make arrangements to bring over Korean or Chinese labor"—a considerable undertaking, one would think.

When the report of friendly observers makes such admissions, we fear that the prospect for the stockholders is dark indeed. We regret that we cannot suggest any way in which our correspondent can recover the money he put into the promotion.

A MEXICAN BANANA PLANTATION

Your answer to D. R. S., of Fort Dodge, Iowa, in the May number is unjust to the Associated Tropical Plantation Company. You do not come anywhere near quoting their literature, and you say that it is a stock proposition. They sell nothing but land. R. D. G., Omaha, Neb.

The above is one of several letters that we have received from correspondents in the West and Northwest who have bought, or contracted to buy, Mexican banana land from the company mentioned. The manager of the sales department, in Kansas City, has also sent us a quantity of literature, which we have examined carefully.

We find that we were mistaken in speaking of the company's "stock-selling literature." No stock in the Associated Tropical Plantation Company has been offered, although it appears that shares in an allied steamship promotion have been sold. For this error we apologize.

We cannot discover, however, that we have been guilty of any other misquotation. The promise of a net annual return of \$400 per acre, which some of our correspondents chal-

lenge, is to be found in a printed slip headed "Explanation of the Plan Governing the Sale of This Land," which was sent us by a physician in Iowa who had been invited to invest. This slip may have been printed by an agent, not by the officers of the company, but we find practically the same statement in a booklet which is avowedly issued by the Associated Tropical Plantation Company. Here a profit of fifty cents a bunch net is given as "very conservative," and various estimates of the annual production are reported, running all the way from six hundred to twelve hundred bunches per acre; and the confident assertion that "the crop is certain" is presented in capital letters.

One of the letters from "satisfied purchasers," which are presumably used to influence sales, makes a still larger claim:

I firmly believe that we will get eight hundred to nine hundred bunches of bananas per acre each year, and they will net us about seventy cents per bunch.

It is scarcely strange that our Fort Dodge correspondent, whose inquiry we answered in May, remarked that the proposition "seemed too good to be true."

We cannot change our position in regard to the general unsuitability of tropical plantation enterprises for the small investor. Nor have we anything to alter in an article on "Farming on Shares," which appeared in our financial department several months ago. In fairness to this company, however, and in courtesy to our correspondents, we are quite willing to state that the managers of the concern give what seems to be a frank statement of its affairs; that several of our correspondents have visited its plantations—which are in the State of Vera Cruz, Mexico—and give a favorable report of their condition; and that the company is actually shipping bananas and selling them in Galveston.

A NEW LINE FOR PROMOTERS

I am sending you a prospectus and some newspaper clippings relative to black fox ranching, and I would like to ask if you regard this as a good business proposition or a speculation pure and simple.

J. K. H., St. John, N. B.

Black fox ranching seems to have been overlooked by American company-promoters in search of an appealing novelty for a stock-selling enterprise. The British maritime provinces have many such projects, however, and in Prince Edward Island the formation of fox-breeding companies or ranches amounts to a craze. Nearly every one on the island, it appears, is talking black foxes and putting money into them at extravagant prices. It is scarcely necessary to say that the originators of the unique industry are making hay while the sun shines by converting their farms or ranches into joint-stock companies, and selling the stock to the public.

Never having raised black foxes, I cannot speak as an expert on the industry. After a careful study of literature bearing upon the subject, however, I am of the opinion that no matter how profitable fox ranching may be when conducted as an individual enterprise, it is too uncertain and speculative to constitute a good corporate proposition. The profits of a black fox farm are derived from one of two sources, or from both combined—from rearing and selling the animals for breeding purposes to other ranches, or from selling them for their pelts.

The value of a black fox is determined by the value of the pelt, and this is governed in part by the rarity of the fur and by the caprices of fashion. At present a pelt is said to average about \$1,400, and the payment of such a high price for a single small skin has greatly stimulated the ranching industry. So many Prince Edward Islanders are embarking in the business that the leading breeders have found it more profitable to sell the animals than the pelts. The natural result has been to keep down the supply and maintain the price of the fur.

London, which is the leading fur market of the world, secured only four hundred black fox skins last year. If the supply should increase materially, and the rare fur become common, no doubt the price of the pelts will decline. As all the ranching prospectuses estimate their profits on the theory that a pair of breeders will, on an average, produce a litter of four and six-tenths cubs each year, and that each pelt has a value of \$1,400, it is easy to see that if the size of the litters and the price of the pelts do not come up to those figures, then all calculations of earnings and profits must fail.

The craze for black fox ranching has resulted in establishing very high prices for the animals. I have studied the prospectuses and literature of four companies, and find that one, capitalized for \$75,000, owns six breeders, giving an average value of \$12,500. Another, capitalized for \$625,000, has forty breeders, giving an average value of \$15,625. A third, with twenty-two breeders, is capitalized for \$335,000, an average of \$15,227. A fourth, having ten breeders, has a share capital of \$150,000, or an average of \$15,000. Ordinary cubs are quoted at \$10,000, and an exceptional strain at \$14,000 a pair.

The risks attendant upon black fox ranching are too great to commend the industry to conservative business men. The number of foxes which go to make up even the larger ranches are limited, and they are capitalized at very high prices. Naturally, they must be subject to all the risks and uncertainties of animal life. Moreover, the earnings cannot be determined accurately, for there is no certainty as to the size of a litter of foxes, and

no assurance that the cubs will grow to maturity.

Moreover, it is not safe to rely upon the price of black fox fur remaining for all time at prevailing quotations. Let the fashion change from fur to feathers, for instance, and the rancher would be undone.

UP SALT CREEK

I have never, to my recollection, seen any article in your financial department on Newlin's Gulch Gold Placer Mining Company, of which I own some stock, but I note a reference to MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE in the literature of the company, which I am sending you. I would thank you for any information you can give me concerning the proposition.

A. S., Steubenville, Ohio.

In the literature sent us by our correspondent we find the following reference to this publication:

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE and numerous other publications have led a gallant fight against companies floating "wildcat" propositions. We desire to commend them for their endeavors to protect the public against misrepresentation, and we invite you, we invite the publications, we invite the State and government, to carefully investigate our property, and if we have misrepresented our property, then we ask you, we ask them, to close the doors of our offices and the mouth of our tunnels.

We cannot say, because we do not know, that MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE was mentioned by the promoters of the enterprise for the purpose of throwing unsuspecting persons off their guard, but we can assure our readers that we have no knowledge of the Newlin's Gulch Gold Placer Company. Lest any one should distort the above reference into an implied indorsement of this proposition, we desire to warn our readers specifically against putting any money into the undertaking, for we doubt if they would ever see it again.

From the literature we learn that Newlin's Gulch is in Colorado. The alleged property is on the right bank of Salt Creek, which we think a most appropriate location for this placer gold mine. Nearly all these stock-selling mining ventures, we believe, are up Salt Creek, literally or metaphorically.

RUBBER STOCK FOR SALE

Will you be so kind as to find out for me how the Honduras Rubber stocks are selling now? I have some to sell. I do not wish the company to think that I am asking, but good advice will help me.

M. H., Yonkers, N. Y.

We regret that we cannot assist this correspondent. It appears that he has put his money into a speculative rubber promotion, and would like to get it out again. If he thinks that we can help him to do so, he overestimates our powers, for we know of no market for the resale of such stocks.

A brief article on the company mentioned appeared in this department last January, on pages 669, 670. If our Yonkers correspondent did not read it, he should do so, although it will not tell him of any way to sell his shares.

THE KANGAROO

A NOVEL—COMPLETE IN THIS ISSUE

BY HARRIS DICKSON

AUTHOR OF "THE BLACK WOLF'S BREED," "SHE THAT HESITATES,"
"THE DUKE OF DEVIL-MAY-CARE," ETC.

ILLUSTRATED BY E. M. ASHE

AS if startled by the suddenness with which night had overtaken them, the rickety shanties at Natchez-under-the-Hill backed themselves against a perpendicular bluff, so that no enemy could sneak up behind. Some stood drunkenly erect, others tottered shoulder to shoulder in a ragged line. All swayed to the rhythm of music, rocked to the shuffle of dancing feet, or gave out the merry clink of chips. All except one—that house was dumb. All of their grimy windows, like so many bleary eyes, blinked upon the dark river. All except one—that house was blind.

Out from the sightless socket of its door two men stepped warily and halted in the shadow. Each carried a pair of heavy saddle-bags.

"Cap, our boat is 'most here," whispered the taller fellow, pointing down the river.

The broad-shouldered, gray-bearded man nodded and said nothing. It was the habit of Old Shack to say nothing.

Half a mile down-stream the Southern Belle swam like a brilliant swan toward the landing. Twin columns of ink and fire-flies gushed from her chimneys; sparks fluttered upward to die among the stars. She whistled—two long blasts and two short ones. Booted men and painted women poured out from every door in Natchez-under-the-Hill. A flatboatman in red shirt staggered to a threshold, waved his arms, and shouted:

"Hooraw fer President Jackson!"

Bells jangled, paddles churned; the boat shivered from keel to pilot-house as she pushed her nose into the mud. Impatient men ran out and sprang ashore.

"Come along, cap, le's git aboard."

The taller fellow started, but Old Shack jerked him back.

"Wait, Bill," he ordered gruffly. "Wait till I get up the steps, then you bring them saddle-bags *keerful*. Keep out o' sight, an' don't come nigh me."

Seeing everything and speaking to nobody, the gray-bearded man crossed a streak of light and picked his way down the slope.

Pine torches flickered on the muddy bank. A dark-faced young Frenchman leaned from the upper guards, his black eyes searching the shore. The gray man saw him.

"Young Frenchy!" he swore to himself, and went on.

A negro held up his torch and shouted:

"Mars Adrun! Mars Adrun! Here me; here's yo' hoss."

Old Shack scowled as he hurried across the stage-plank, passed the foot of the stairs, and stopped. In darkness on the lower deck he watched Adrien de Valence, who came bounding down the stair and rushed impetuously across the stage-plank. Before the young man could check himself, he bumped against Wild Bill. Bill dropped his saddle-bags and threw up both hands, like a devil's-horse trying to balance itself, then toppled off knee-deep in mud.

De Valence halted instantly, hat in hand. "I crave your pardon, sir," he said, as he knelt down and pulled Bill back to the plank.

"Where's my saddle-bags?" Bill demanded.

"Here you are, sir; I am very, *very* sorry."

"You oughter look where you're going!"

"Quite true, sir; I was most awkward, and in great haste. Pray forgive me."

"You ain't thinkin' I'm goin' to let you git off like that?"

Bill's waistcoat gaped, exposing a bowie-knife, and his ready hand flew to its hilt. Captain de Valence was far slighter than the other, but he did not hesitate. Two swift steps, and a swifter blow caught the big fellow on the point of his chin. Knife in hand, Wild Bill went off backward and floundered in the mud.

De Valence stepped to the edge of the stage-plank.

"My apologies again, sir."

His eyes glittered, and a long pistol glittered at his side.

In the hubbub of making fast no one had witnessed the affair except the gray-bearded man. De Valence turned and fronted the newcomer, who came running, but showed no weapon. Old Shack was looking at the man in the mud instead of the man who struck the blow. Kneeling on the saddle-bags, he bent over and spoke peremptorily.

"Get up, you fool, and come aboard this boat!"

Bill slouched around surlily, picked up his saddle-bags, and passed in arm's reach of De Valence, but without looking at him. Apparently the gray-bearded man had done nothing more than stop a brawl in which he had no concern.

When Old Shack got up-stairs he spoke quietly to the head clerk.

"I am Captain Jarrot, going to Vicksburg. Can I have my room at once?"

"Certainly, captain; Kentucky state-room is reserved. Jim, show this gentleman to Kentucky."

The negro porter came up and took hold of his saddle-bags.

"Let go," Old Shack ordered. "I've got 'em."

Jim led off grandly, down the long cabin of white and gold, beneath trembling prisms of crystal chandeliers, and flung open a stateroom. Old Shack immediately

went in, closed and locked the door, hid his saddle-bags underneath the berth, and covered them with a life-preserver. Hearing steps along the guards, he set the outer door ajar, and Wild Bill peered in.

"Come here," Shack ordered. "Set down them bags. Lock that door."

Bill carried out all three commands in rotation. Old Shack scarcely glanced at Bill; he was eying those saddle-bags which hit the floor with such a thump.

"Cap, what's in them bags? They's all-fired heavy."

"Cartridges; an' I tole you to be mighty keerful with 'em." To assure himself, Old Shack touched the bags with his foot. "An' furthermore, didn't I tell you to sneak aboard jes' as quiet as you could, an' we warn't to know each other? You're a simlin'-headed fool! Got a notion to send you ashore."

Bill's face was serious.

"But, cap'n, I—"

"Did you recognize that Frenchy?"

"Never seen him afore, not to my knowin'."

"We're more'n apt to see him again. He's Valence."

"Y'all tole me General Valence was a teeny old codger."

"This ain't the general; it's his son. Been fighting under Sam Houston along the Rio Grande. Do you know where he's aimin' for?"

Bill looked puzzled and stupid.

"He ain't never spoke nary word to me 'bout it."

Old Shack bristled with wrath at the henchman's density.

"Didn't you see them Kinlock hosses waitin' for 'im? Here you are, been watchin' Kinlock Hall for nigh onto a week, and don't know them hosses yit! What you got eyes for? Didn't even see that Kinlock nigger! You can't be no speculator 'thout you takes special notice o' niggers an' hosses. Frenchy's goin' to see that girl; then most likely he'll hit the Trace for Marengo."

Even the thick-headed Bill could foresee what might happen.

"Hadh't we better stop 'im some'res 'long the road?"

"No, reckon not. Dick Hullum must ha' got that box before now." Old Shack ran his fingers through his stubby gray beard. "Old Frenchy took that box out o' bank in Mobile, an' carried it home two weeks

ago. We would ha' grabbed it last fall, but we had sech bad luck."

"Cap," Bill ventured presently, "don't you calkerlate we better send word, so Dick won't git ketched unbeknownst?"

Bill kept rubbing the bruise on his chin. The captain pondered and decided.

"Yes; get out your paper."

Bill drew the little table toward him and sat down. Old Shack stood up and leaned over the writer's shoulder.

"Now, Bill, put this down straight, and spell her correct. Ef you don't, nobody can't read it. Tell Dick: 'The person we supposed far away has come back. He mought stay here, or mought ride on to Alabama. This would make a bad hitch with you. Hurry up and finish our business.'"

Old Shack dictated very deliberately, word for word, and Bill labored over each character with painstaking accuracy. When completed the letter looked like this:

UNO7OF:J3000J
 E773JOCJJJ
 J7NJJL3E0UJL
 UNOE77N0J7J
 NOF03F77N0F
 7C0300J7J7J
 EJ0N7J03E7C
 JU0JUJC77N
 070N33E7E77
 E777707JN3E7
 UE7700J7

The two men spelled it over together, then Bill looked up.

"Goin' to sign it, cap?"

Old Shack made a single character at the end, totally different from the others—the sign which every speculator in a dozen States would recognize as "Old Shack's fist":



"Seal her up, Bill."

Bill folded the letter and enclosed it in

a home-made envelope. Old Shack took it from him.

"No, don't write nothin' on the back; I'll send a word o' mouth."

"Cap, do you want me to git this off to-night?"

"Don't want *you* to git it off at all. You git out o' sight, an' stay there. Somebody mought tromp on yo' tender feelin's. Don't lemme see or hear of you no more, until we meet in Vicksburg at the Kangaroo. Git!"

Bill vanished. Old Shack locked the door and knelt beside those mud-incrusted saddle-bags.

"Wonder what that fool would ha' done if he knowed what he was totin'!"

His avaricious eyes lighted up as he took out two buckskin bags, made exceedingly long and narrow, so as to be worn around the waist like belts. Never a coin jingled as he lifted them and examined the seams.

Having laid both bags lengthwise between the mattresses of the upper berth, Old Shack stopped to consider. He hated to leave his money unguarded, yet dreaded to send Wild Bill ashore with that important letter. He chose the lesser danger, locked both doors carefully, and went out. He strolled nonchalantly through the cabin, yet he lost no time going down the forward stair, climbing the muddy bank, and reentering that same unlighted house. An unkempt white man appeared, shading a candle.

"Jason, where's Jim?"

"Across the river; got some hosses."

"Can you git him here by daylight?"

"Yep."

"Tell him to ride like hell-a-beatin'-tan-bark, an' take this letter to Ben Akers's grocery in Marengo County, Alabama. Jim knows the place."

Jason's hair was red and tousled, but the tangles never got into Jason's brains.

"It's did, cap! Jim'll git it thar."

Old Shack stepped outside and returned to the boat.

II

DE VALENCE grudged those five good minutes wasted in a brawl when he had journeyed with headlong ardor for more than as many weeks. Somebody would be sitting on the front steps at Kinlock Hall; somebody would be watching the road. She who waits the coming rider travels twice as far as he.

Up the slippery bank he hurried to the grinning Pericles, who held a bridle and raised a lightwood torch.

"How are you, Perry? How is everybody?"

"She's mighty well, Mars Adrun, *mighty* well—a settin' on de top step wait-in' fer you, suh."

The young Frenchman laughed joyously and patted the horse that was to carry him.

"Good, old Bullet!" he said, and flung himself into the saddle.

De Valence headed Bullet up the steep road, zigzagging to the summit of the bluff. Pericles grinned and showed every white-washed tooth in his head.

"Dat's de way Mars Adrun mos' ingin'lly acks; jes' go 'long an' do what he sot out to do."

Bullet ascended to the heights and paused for breath. Then the clean-limbed hunter went clattering through the business section of Natchez, turning corners in the out-skirts, losing himself in the perfumed shade of magnolias, and wheeled in at the big gate of Kinlock Hall. The speeding lover scarcely saw those long, curving beds of verbenas which, like many-colored tapestries, unrolled on either side. Sweeping around a circle of scarlet geraniums, he rode straight toward the Corinthian columns which flanked a noble portico. Uncle Mingo hobbled out and caught his bridle.

"Howdy, Mars Adrun!"

"How are you, Uncle Mingo?" and he bounded up the steps.

Across the polished hallway came a tap-tap-tapping of heels, and a vision of shimmering white appeared in the doorway. Tilting forward, as a bird launching itself into flight, Cecile extended both her hands.

"Adrien!"

He drew in his breath with a gasp, the realization being more glorious than his dreams. Cecile had never looked so wonderful, even on that miracle night at the opera in New Orleans. On that night she was feverishly brilliant, surrounded by courtiers, intoxicated with a triumphant debut. Scarlet poppies had nodded in her hair. Her eyes had flashed to match her jewels.

That first sight had dazzled him; tonight her eyes were tender, and with a haze of mistiness, no longer meeting his with the defiant innocence of unstirred girlhood. She glanced up, and her bosom trembled.

De Valence held her at arm's length. As one who has thirsted in the desert, he gazed from the tips of her satin slippers to the coils of her burnished hair. No scarlet poppies nodded, no jewels glittered; an old-fashioned cameo rose and fell at the roundness of her throat. Instead of Oriental silks, she wore girlish white, and daintily flowered ribbon. The fire of womanhood burned deep within, and her lover felt it in the warmth of throbbing finger-tips.

Full-lipped she pouted:

"Adrien, you have said no word; you only stare; are you displeased with my dress?"

He brought his lips very close and whispered something. She flushed, trembled, and smiled.

Judge Kinlock came slowly out of the library, with incomparable dignity. His long beard parted at the chin and flowed down his breast like scarcely separated streams of silver. Frankly he took the young Frenchman's hand.

"I am glad to see you, Adrien. We must talk together; come."

Adrien would have held back, but Cecile nodded for him to go, and made them comfortable in the library, with a lunch on the table between their chairs. For days she had debated the exact spot where they must sit—and where she would sit—during this momentous consultation.

She went straight to her own place and sat on the top step in the moonlight, resting her head against a tall white column. The library windows opened to the floor, with curtains fastened back. Adrien could glance out and see her. That's why Cecile had placed his chair as she did.

Knowing so well what her father meant to say, she could almost hear his words, and she did not want to do that—deliberately. He was telling Adrien of the inquiries made to determine his fitness as a husband for this only daughter.

Perry's wagon rattled along the driveway and stopped at the foot of the steps.

"Missy! Li' miss, here's Mars Adrun's things; I fotch 'em from de boat."

Cecile walked across the gallery and looked in at the window.

"Father, here's Adrien's baggage."

At first Judge Kinlock did not hear. He had leaned across the table and caught Adrien by the hand.

"There's just the two of us—now."

This is a large property, and it will be all hers. That's one reason why I made such careful inquiries concerning you. I have always wanted a son"—Judge Kinlock's voice faltered. In the effort to control himself he emphasized the words—"a son of whom I can be proud."

Tears struggled to the daughter's eyes. She waited a moment, then called:

"Father! Oh, father! Adrien's baggage has come. Where shall I put it?"

Ordinarily, Cecile would have attended to this herself; but she knew that her father had arranged to send Adrien home at once, and only asked in the hope that he might have altered his determination. Judge Kinlock scarcely glanced up.

"Put it where he can unpack and pack again quickly."

Cecile understood that the matter was settled; she turned to Perry.

"Come, I'll show you the room."

When Cecile came back again, down the great staircase, she passed the library door; her father was leaning forward and speaking earnestly. Adrien kept shaking his head, interrupting and protesting:

"I meant to stay here three or four days at the shortest, then go to Marengo, and return at once with my father. He is too old to travel alone."

"Yes, and the roads are too perilous for you to journey alone. Outlaws are stealing our horses and running off our negroes. Last week two strangers were robbed and murdered near St. Catharines."

Cecile had resumed her seat, and was listening frankly to their discussion, when something tugged at her dress.

"Missy, missy!" a guarded voice whispered out of the darkness. Black fingers clutched her skirt and a black face looked up from the hydrangea bed. "Missy! Li' missy!"

"What is it, Uncle Mingo?"

The old negro pointed toward the rear garden, and his voice was scarcely audible:

"He's out dar."

"Tell him to go away, for Heaven's sake, go away!"

"He ain't gwine do it, missy."

"Has anybody seen him?"

"Nobody 'cept me. He said he's 'bleeged to see you right away. Ef you don't come out dere, he's a comin' in here."

Cecile's eyes shifted apprehensively to her father and Adrien. Holding her skirts

to keep them from swishing, she drew away from the window, tiptoed down the steps, and crept around the corner. She passed a clump of arbor-vitæ; her dress fluttered across patches of moonlight; then she darted behind a row of hollyhocks, and vanished into the scuppernong arbor. Uncle Mingo halted outside, a faithful sentry at his post.

Dark as it was beneath that leafy roof, Cecile ran confidently to the straight young figure, and cuddled in his arms like a frightened, but happy, child. He drew the girl close to him, held her face in a beam of moonlight, pushed back the hair, and kissed her forehead.

"Oh, why, why did you come?" she whispered.

"Do you not want to see me?"

"I *always* want to see you — what's that?" She pushed aside the vines and peered out. "It's Uncle Mingo. He is keeping watch. You must go, *quickly!*" The young man stood immovable. She pleaded and clung to him. "It would be terrible if father should catch you here *to-night!*"

"Why to-night? What is happening to-night?" He detected her emphasis on that last word.

"To-night? Oh, nothing. Why do you not stay in Vicksburg? Why do you come here?"

"To see you; you are all I have."

Cecile trembled like a bird, and her heart beat fast. She listened for every sound and glanced at every shadow.

"Now you *must* go!"—pushing him from her. "Father may call at any moment. I shall be missed. Hurry, hurry!"

Through the chinks between the leaves both of them could see Judge Kinlock standing on the back gallery. He started down the step toward them, and called out:

"Cecile! Cecile!"

"I *must* answer him. He'll send the servants to search for me."

"No matter!"—defiantly, bitterly.

"But father suspects." Cecile jerked loose and darted out in the moonlight.

"Here I am, father!"

"Come to the house."

The young man in the arbor followed to the shadow's very edge, and still held out his arms. Cecile shook her head, and spoke excitedly, brokenly:

"Do be prudent. Think of the scandal if you and father should quarrel—*here.*"

You must not come back, but write to me. I am *so* anxious. Send your letters to Jessie Colfax, and I shall get them."

Cecile stooped behind the hollyhocks and ran on until she came to a second path, then turned and hurried to the house. At the last bend of the walk she paused and looked back. A faint moon shone upon a deserted garden.

Adrien stepped out from behind a camellia bush and touched her arm. Cecile gasped.

"Oh! Oh, it's you!"

"Cecile, you are not well! What's the matter?"

"Nothing; you startled me. I am very well."

"You seem frightened and worried. Come, let us sit down and talk. I am leaving at daylight for Marengo."

"I know," she answered.

He linked his arm in hers and tried to turn.

"Let us sit in the scuppernong arbor—do you remember our first night there, long ago?"

"Yes, yes, I remember," and she drew him nervously along another path, which led toward the front.

"Your father had already arranged for me to join a party traveling to Noxubee County. He insists that it is dangerous to travel alone."

"It is dangerous," Cecile coincided positively, "but I do not want you to go."

Adrien shrugged his shoulders and stopped.

"They have already settled it. I must go; but I'm coming back with my father, to stay a month."

"When? When?"

"Exactly three weeks from to-day."

"Oh, dear! that's when I am going to Port Gibson for Margery Buckingham's wedding."

"Then I shall go to Port Gibson."

"No, no, you must not," Cecile answered quickly, and flushed. "Everybody would tease, and I couldn't bear it."

Loverwise, they strolled around a corner of the house, while that scowling man watched from beneath the scuppernongs.

Cecile's favorite bench was near the front, backed against a hedge, with green-sward sloping from it and gorgeous verbenas blooming at their feet. They had scarcely taken their seats when two horsemen clattered up the driveway and dis-

mounted at the steps. Judge Kinlock came out on the gallery and shook hands with both men. Presently the judge called:

"Adrien! Adrien! Here are two gentlemen who want to see you."

The young Frenchman rose petulantly.

"I do not want to see them! Wait, Cecile, until I come back."

Cecile sat alone for some minutes, glancing uneasily toward the rear garden, while Adrien talked with the newcomers. Old Mingo crept up behind her and whispered:

"Better go in de house, missy; he say he gwine to hab it out wid Mars Adrun."

Cecile's hands clenched in her lap.

"Get him to go away."

"He ain't gwine nowhar."

"Beg him to go, for my sake."

"Tain't no use, missy; he got one o' dem tantrum fits. I can't hardly keep him from marchin' smack to de big house whar ole marster's at."

"Have it out with Mr. Adrien? What can he mean by that?"

"Lawd knows, missy. You keep Mars Adrun outen his way."

"Uncle Mingo, run back and stay with him—every minute. Do not let him move out of your sight. If he *won't* go away, tell him I'll come out again."

"Yas'm, dat mought pacify him, but you's the onliest one what kin do it."

Old Mingo hobbled off by a roundabout path through the garden.

Adrien finished his conversation and started down the steps. Cecile rose and hurried to the house. At the bottom step she recognized Mr. Wardell, the Farleys' overseer, and young Rollo Douglass.

"How do you do, Rollo? How are you, Mr. Wardell?"

"Cecile," Judge Kinlock spoke briefly, "these gentlemen have been kind enough to ride ten miles to inquire if Adrien is going. They think it best for him to leave to-night, in their company, as the party starts from Second Creek at daylight."

"These gentlemen are very kind—" Adrien objected.

"That's best," Cecile decided promptly. "We should be very uneasy if you went alone."

"I wouldn't do at all, miss." Zeb Wardell shook his bushy head. "That Shack gang is takin' the country. Folks can't ride the public roads without they got a regiment o' soldiers."

Cecile caught Adrien's hand.

"Hurry up-stairs and pack your saddle-bags. Father, what horse shall he ride?"

"Bullet. Tell Mingo to have Bullet saddled and brought around."

Adrien had no excuse except that he wanted to stay. Cecile pushed him toward the door, and he went sulkily up-stairs. Within ten minutes he came down again, carrying a pair of saddle-bags and a rifle, with a brace of pistols at his belt.

"Ready, sir! Let's ride." Wardell laughed. "I reckon we'll have a pretty tollyble good time in spite of Old Shack and all his gang."

Adrien gazed meaningly at Cecile, then backed into the dark parlor. With a defiant uptilting of her chin, the girl followed him.

"Oh, Adrien, Adrien, I cannot let you go! I am afraid—afraid of everything where you are concerned."

"Then I won't go. I shall send word to my father. His servants can guide him safely."

"You are going." She kissed him again and again before wrenching herself loose. "Now go!"

She moved out into the lighted hall, where everybody could see, and there was no further temptation. Adrien walked straight to the gallery; Judge Kinlock took him affectionately by the hand.

"Be very cautious, my son. Yes, gentlemen, Captain de Valence is soon to be my son."

"Whew!" whistled Wardell, swinging himself into the saddle.

Extending one hand to Cecile, the other to Judge Kinlock, Adrien turned and strode down the steps. Bullet started off in his famous fox-trot, which would cover many a mile.

Cecile watched from the top step and listened. When she could no longer hear their hoof-beats she sank down against the big white column. Judge Kinlock leaned against the same column in the shadow.

Presently Cecile felt old Mingo tugging again at her dress.

"Missy, missy, he's done gone." She did not answer, and Mingo repeated more loudly: "He's done gone."

"What's that?" The master stepped out into the light. Mingo sprang up terrified, his old knees knocking together. "Mingo, what did you say?"

"Nothin', marster; I jes' axed li' missy ef Mars Adrien done gone."

"Yes, he's gone—let us hope that he may return in safety."

Cecile's figure drooped against the column, a hopeless little huddle of sobbing white. She tottered up and threw both arms around her father's neck.

"Oh, father! Father! I'm so unhappy!"

III

THE red road, a mere bridle-path cut by wagon-wheels and cumbered with stumps, ran westward through the woods of Marengo County. Twenty leagues beyond it passed out of Alabama into the young State of Mississippi. Still farther westward it joined the famous Natchez Trace.

A dangerous channel was that Natchez Trace, along which flowed a turbulent stream of adventurers with empty pockets—prospectors whose saddle-bags were stuffed with shinplaster currency—proud Virginia planters who emigrated with wagon-trains and negroes—pioneers who rode sturdily, each shouldering an ax to conquer his hundred and sixty acres. Men died in their boots along those lonely paths, and blood-stained coins clinked merrily across the tavern tables.

The road wound on, unvexed by hoof or foot. Warier than the hare that hopped before him, a man peered from the cane-brake, through the silent woods and along the no less deserted thoroughfare. From his homespun clothes and limp hat he might have passed for a Georgia cracker or a mountaineer from Eastern Tennessee—a nondescript native of almost anywhere; but there was something in his personality that warred with what he wore, except the boots of finest leather, which seemed to fit his character as fastidiously as they fitted his feet.

He moved slowly out of concealment, but with less of Southwestern slouchiness than of premeditated caution. His oyster-gray eyes rested upon a fence and garden which lay beyond the road. Being of boards, this fence must necessarily attract attention; being whitewashed, it became a landmark.

On the slope beyond stood a tall, white house, one story in the rear and two stories in front—like a small square box standing against a big square box. The smaller box was old and of whitewashed logs, the bigger one was newer and had glass windows, like the court-house at Wetumpka.

Gambler Dick Hullum had seen many a

glass window before his sudden emigration to the Southwest. Nevertheless, he absorbed himself in scrutinizing the doors, windows, gates, fences, stable servant quarters, until he felt sure of remembering every entrance and exit, even in the night.

Distinct through the still evening came the muffled thump, thump, thump of a horse. Hullum dodged back into cover. A massive black stallion moved on proudly. The tiny old man who bestrode him was not a nondescript, but a vivid and remarkable personage. Men always turned to look again at old De Valence, even without suspecting that he had once commanded armies—a duke, a marshal of France, and the beloved friend of her mighty emperor.

Gambler Dick scarcely saw the horse. The rider held his fascinated stare. This was a dainty little man, a dapper little man, a slim, trim manikin of a man. Thoughtless people would have called him foppish, but there was something else, a deeper and dominating something else. There wasn't enough liquor in the tavern to make Dick Hullum bold enough to jeer at his frilled shirt, or his spread-tailed coat with its double row of shining buttons. In spite of frills and snuff-box, and legs like pipe-stems, there was a command in every gray hair of that tiny man's mustache, and conscious authority in the set of his grizzled goatee.

The little man sat profoundly silent, gazing along the shaded red streak of a road. Seventeen years! It was very long to stagnate and to brood in exile.

Many quaint and curious things went traveling through this county; but nothing passed his gate more incongruous than himself and those who fled with him after the empire fell in ruins at Waterloo. Men who once had played at pitch-and-toss with crowns came hither to work as plowmen, to tend their grapes in silken hose and silver-buckled shoes. Backwoodsmen stopped to gape at grand dames with powdered hair who looked from the doors of rough log cabins.

The Frenchman's dreams had turned to ashes. Everything had failed except his indomitable soul, and that gallant son for whom he hoped a brilliant career when Napoleon's empire should be rebuilt.

De Valence turned and rode on slowly through the curving lane. A burly Norman in long black blouse came out of the vineyard and took his bridle.

"Gontran, is all in readiness for our departure at daylight?"

"Ready, *mon général!*"

The ex-sergeant stood rigid, with hand upon his cap until De Valence had entered the house.

In the front room, huge and square, Adrien de Valence knelt on the floor beside an open chest.

"Father, the chest is packed."

Adrien laid his hand upon the lid to close it.

"Wait, Adrien." General de Valence passed into a rear room and returned with an oblong iron box, half the height of a man's knee. "We shall take this, her marriage gift."

"Not that, father, not *that!*"

"Even that. Is she not worthy of it?" He nodded and smiled at the sparkle that came into the eye of his son. Without another protest, Adrien knelt and stowed the box safely in the chest. The old man stood looking down at his son. "Who will have a better right than *your* wife—Mme. la Duchesse de Valence? Does she know?"

"She knows that we are French and well-born."

"You have told of your service in Texas?"

"She has heard," he answered modestly.

"All?"

"Yes, and more." Adrien laughed; his exploits in that romantic land had lost no glamour from their telling by his friends.

"It is well. You are young. The emperor was five years older before he commanded an army. But there is now a peace—everywhere."

IV

DICK HULLUM lay low in the canebrake until that queer little Frenchy was gone; then he came out and walked through the bushes toward a cabin which stood in the forks of the road. There was nothing noteworthy about this cabin, or in the sign of "Grocery" above its door. A rough gallery of puncheons—logs chipped square on top—extended to the road; behind it a single room.

From safe concealment Hullum eyed the men who lounged on the gallery, and the boys pitching horseshoes in the dust. He had never seen them before, yet Hullum knew their kind—idlers that always hung

around a doggerly. A loose-jointed fellow with "galluses" crossed on the back of his shirt, slouched against a post, spitting tobacco and languidly observing the game.

"Reckon that's Ben Akers," Hullum decided, and moved out of the bushes.

Then a singular noise caught his ear, and he dodged back. For a moment he stood listening to the low tones of a fife, perhaps, or a whistle, which came from behind the blacksmith shop opposite the grocery. It could not be called music; it was more like the chirping of many birds—the shrill cry of the jay, the plaint of the rain-crow, the panther wailing like a babe, the whistle of the partridge, and the whir of his wings.

Dick Hullum knew that sound, and knew who was making it. That's why he shivered and wanted to run.

"Curse that idiot! He's everywhere, and he ain't got to see me."

The gambler turned stealthily and hurried back. Every few steps before plunging into the canebrake he looked over his shoulder, muttering and cursing.

He shoved through the cane into a gloomy glade beneath a big tree. Two hobbled horses munched the young shoots; two saddles lay on the ground, and two rifles leaned against the tree. A lank, goose-necked white man rested flat on his back.

"Well, Dick?" he inquired.

Hullum had not recovered from his agitation; he spoke jerkily.

"I took a squint at Frenchy's place. We'll leave our hosses in that plum thicket behind the house. Get up, Tite; go down to Ben Akers's and find out if everything is safe."

Mr. Titus Higgins propped himself indolently up on one elbow.

"Why didn't you go? You was purty nigh thar."

"Well, you see"—Hullum evaded his partner's disconcerting stare—"there's a crowd o' fellers pitching horseshoes; an' me bein' a stranger, they might ask a lot o' questions."

"You could ha' sneaked in the back door an' squawked fer Ben."

"Never thought o' that."

Tite Higgins sat up.

"Pears to me, Dick, you's gettin' daffy an' never thinks o' nothin'."

Tite Higgins rambled off toward the grocery. Hullum gazed after him a moment, then called:

"Be keerful, Tite! Will o' the Woods is down there, playin' on them cussed whistles. Oh, I forgot—here's that money for Ben Akers."

Higgins turned back with meditative deliberation, took the money, and stood thoughtfully scratching his chin.

"So it's Will o' the Woods? Dick, I 'lowed 'twas something skeered you off. I seed it plain when you fust come up. What makes you so skittish o' that crack-brained ijit?"

Hullum dropped his eyes. "I ain't what you might call *skeered* o' Will; it jes' gives me the fidgets to hear him a tootin' on them danged little pipes o' his'n. Then we got to figger on the fact that he's likely to meet us in Vicksburg or New Orleans an' say:

"I know *you*, I know *you*; I seed you in Marengo!"

Tite Higgins nodded.

"That's gospel; a feller can't rig himself up so that Will o' the Woods won't know him, same as a hound knows a smell. One time he got the cap in a mighty ticklish scrape." The backwoodsman kept stroking his chin, his little blue eyes boring into the other man. "Dick, 'tain't none o' my business, none howsomever; but you makes me wonder ef what I heerd tell of ain't mebbe so. Thar be folks what say that Will o' the Woods is a brother o' yo' gal what you fotch to Vicksburg an' set up in the Kangaroo."

"What of it?" Hullum demanded fiercely. "Maggie Belle couldn't help it if she is got a ijit brother."

"No, Dick; I ain't sayin' nary word ag'in' Maggie Belle. She's a fine gal. But folks do say that you an' the cap kilt her daddy, an' likewise her brothers, and thought that this here boy was kilt too—the night you-all burned up their cabin. Folks do say—"

Black veins swelled in Hullum's throat.

"It's a danged lie! Everybody knows that I had done got Maggie Belle an' was more'n fifty miles away when that trouble riz up. Them fellers got what they oughter. They knowed too much, an' was fixin' to tell it."

"That part's all right; I ain't findin' fault with the way y'all acted. O' co'se, them blab-mouth fellers had got to be shet up. I jes' couldn't help takin' notice how narvous you an' cap always gits when Will comes along. One time, when cap couldn't stand it no longer, he says to Matt Snyder:

" 'Matt, go out yonder an' drill a hole plumb through that devil with the whistles; I'll give you five hundred dollars!'

" 'Ole Matt jes' set close an' never moved.

" 'Cap, I'd love to 'blige you. I'm in mighty low sarcumstances, an' sholy needs them five hundred. But why don't you shoot him yo'self? Thar he is, settin' stiller'n a sheep.'

" 'Cap never said no more; jes got up an' walked plumb away. So-long, Dick; I'll go see Ben Akers."

When Tite Higgins reached the point where Dick Hullum had turned back he likewise paused to reconnoiter. The boys were still pitching quoits. Ben Akers was still leaning against the post—a solid hour is not too long for a man to rest his back. Will o' the Woods kept whistling on his pipes.

" 'Huh!' Tite observed. " 'I ain't blamin' Dick none whatever; it do sound kind o' shivery. Well, 'tain't no sense in paradin' before all them fellers, bein' as how my business is strictly private. Thar must be a back door or a winder."

His slinking figure crossed the clearing that had grown up in sassafras, and gained thicker brush behind the grocery. There was a back door. Tite listened, then lifted the latch and peered in. Nobody saw him.

Through the front door he could see those crossed "galluses" on Ben Akers's back. Jim Woodside's frizzly head was bending over a horseshoe. In a rear corner of the store, behind the partition, he saw a mattress, a pail of water, and a tin pan. Tite slipped through the door, closed it softly, and hid himself among Ben Akers's domestic arrangements. There he paused, searching swiftly with fingers and eyes.

" 'Ben must be all right; cap's got his name on the list."

Tite craned his long neck around the partition and rattled a pan. Ben Akers glanced backward. Tite beckoned. Akers started perceptibly and spat meditatively between two bony fingers. Nobody noticed him as he turned into the store. The stoop in his shoulders straightened. His last few steps were moderately brisk, until he stopped and looked down at the stranger who was sitting on his bed.

" 'Whatcher want?'

" 'Seven prime coon-hides,' Tite Higgins spoke it meaningly.

Another signal passed—with the hands

—swift, almost unnoticeable, but it satisfied them both.

" 'I reckon you are Ben Akers, all right,' said Higgins, smiling and handing a scrap of paper to the other man.

Ben crinkled his eyes and studied this message:

J F R O O C L J E U R Z
 O J F O O L N Z



However crude the cipher might be, it was a strain upon Ben Akers's cruder mind; but he finally puzzled out three words.

" 'This says: 'Friend; caution; Frenchy.' "

" 'Keerect you are! Thar's Old Shack's fist, and that means to tell me all about the Frenchies."

Ben reached down ruminatingly and scratched his leg.

" 'Friend, ain't you brung me nothin' else?'

" 'I forgot—here's yourn.' Higgins took out seven gold pieces, thirty-five dollars, and laid them in Ben's hand with a half apology. " 'We never done so good in Arkansaw. Four o' them niggers got plumb away."

" 'Is that all I gits for my share?'

" 'No; that ain't a primin'; we got a lot o' niggers an' hosses what ain't sold yet. Now talk business. Is this Frenchy job all safe?'

" 'I reckon so; but 'tain't no tellin' 'bout them Frenchies."

" 'Is he got that box at the house?'

" 'Yep; fotched it from Mobile this last gone Wednesday a week ago. I seed him when he rid up from the boat; had it on the pummel of his saddle, an' one o' them double-jinted Frenchies on each side. I calkerlates thar's more'n a thousand dollars in that box, don't you? ' Ben's eyes narrowed into a couple of slits, and squinted pecuniarily.

" 'Huh! Thousand dollars! It's got diamonds and sech. Who sleeps in that house?'

" 'The old man, that's all. Young Frenchy is off in Texas a fightin'."

" 'Jes' one old man? I don't calkerlate it's goin' to be sech a tough job. Two men ought to wring his neck like a chicken, and git away without wakin' the cat."

Ben shook his head dubiously.

"Ef you-all wring his neck it'll start a mighty heap o' wranglin' around these parts. Folks likes that old man. Couldn't you-all manage 'thout killin' him ontire?"

"Co'se that'd be pleasanter. I always says I don't aim to kill nobody jes' fer fun, without it's got to be did; but then agin, a feller sleeps mighty easy when he don't leave nobody behind to rise up and p'int a finger at him afterward."

"That's so," Ben agreed. "I reckon every business is 'bleeged to have *some* little onconveniences."

Higgins wasn't much for talking, and turned to go.

"I reckon that's about all. So-long, friend!"

The men shook hands limply. Ben Akers hesitated before he asked:

"Pardner, be yo' name Dick Hullum?"

"No, but—" Tite hesitated in turn. It behooved speculators to be cautious.

"Well," Ben observed in his slow drawl, "feller rid up here yistiddy an' lef' a note for Dick Hullum; said he come lickety split from Natchez."

"Give it to me. Dick Hullum is out yonder in them bushes."

Ben shook his head at first, then reached into a coffee-pot, took out the unaddressed letter, and handed it to Higgins. Tite looked it over.

"Tain't no backin' on it."

"It's fer Dick Hullum, all right," Ben insisted.

Higgins was still examining the letter which Old Shack had sent, when he was startled by a clear voice shouting from the road:

"Hello, Ben!"

Both men saw a stocking-foot sorrel prancing in the dust.

"Git out o' here quick," Ben whispered.

"Thar's young Frenchy, from Texas."

"It is, is it?" Tite exclaimed. "Wait a minute, pardner. Fix yerself to-night so you kin prove one o' them things—what the lawyers calls allyby—for all night—an' *prove it by plenty good witnesses.*"

Tite squeezed through the back door and was gone.

V

BEN hurried out to the front of his store, where a shiny, slick-groomed mare, brown and perky as a thrush, danced about in the sheer joy of living. The laughing

young rider controlled her by a pressure of his knee.

Big Sim Ellis suspended his game of quoits and deposited his horseshoes on the edge of the gallery.

"Howdy, Adrun? When did you-all come home?"

"Last night—mighty glad to see all you boys again."

Big Sim was rubbing the little mare's nose and talking.

"Adrun, is you-all goin' to ride Miss Spitfire at the Wetumpky races? We-all 'lowed to go up thar an' bet a whole lot. When you-all rides Miss Spitfire *yo'se'f*, Abe Skinner's bay geldin' ain't nowhere—or I won't never bet on two par agin!"

Although born in France, Adrien de Valence had lived for so many years among these people that he dropped quite naturally into their drawling vernacular.

"More'n likely I'll ride; that is, ef I git back from Mississip in time."

Ben Akers pricked up his ears, and inquired with neighborly interest:

"Is you-all 'lowin' to go 'way? I 'lowed you was jes' come."

"Yes, leavin' at crack o' day to-morrer for Natchez. Ben, please hand out two bits' worth o' salt. Put it in a sack—hurry!"

Ben's cold eyes contracted. Involuntarily he glanced toward the canebrake which had just swallowed Tite Higgins.

Adrien sat his horse and smiled to hear the familiar sound of pipes from behind Big Sim's blacksmith shop.

"That's Will o' the Woods. Oh, Will! Will!" he shouted. "Come here!"

A tangle of strawlike hair poked itself around the corner; Will o' the Woods trudged barefoot across the road, a step or two at a time, pausing to blow on a handful of cane whistles. In face, Will was no more than a boy of twelve, spindling, long-drawn out, and uncannily wise. In the shoulders and in the legs he had grown to man's size. His breeches had once been long, but were shorter now, and flapped in fringes about his shanks. A frazzled coat dangled its limp tails; a brimless hat perched on his head, allowing the half-incarcerated hair to straggle beneath it, like the cockle-burred mane of a clay-bank horse.

Piping as he walked, keeping time, listening, the lack-wit marched to Adrien's side and halted. His vacant eyes stared

until he recognized his friend; then he pointed a skinny finger.

"I knows *you*—yo' name's Adrun. I seed you last gone Wednesday two weeks, at N'Yawleens, with a lady; St. Looley Hotel."

"Ketched you, Adrien, didn't he?" laughed Big Sim.

"Sure as shootin', I was there."

Will seated himself on the edge of the gallery, and from his shoulder-sack poured a peck of cane whistles and a big clasp-knife. He cocked his head to one side, like a wise old jaybird; with finicky wisdom, ranging their sizes from left to right, he selected his whistles and puckered his lips, blowing lightly up and down the scale. The idiot's empty face seemed glorified with joy and inspiration. He leaned against the post with eyes uplifted and began to play.

Akers slouched out of the grocery and handed Adrien a bag of salt.

"Who-all be's a goin' to Mississipp?"

"My father and I."

"The old man, he goin'?" Ben queried in surprise.

"Yes."

Sim Ellis remarked solemnly, as was a neighbor's right:

"Adrun, 'pears like to me you's travelin' that Natchez 'Trace jes' reg'lar as ducks to the pond. What be's a drawin' you? Gal at t'other end o' the line?"

Adrien's smile encouraged Sim.

"We-all ain't got no objection 'bout the gal, pervided us boys ain't disapp'inted 'bout y'-all ridin' Miss Spitfire at Wetumpky. She can't set her foot to the ground without pickin' up a mile an' flingin' it behind her. We-all wants Abe Skinner to git et up bodaciously."

"All right!" laughed Adrien. "Abe Skinner can't make seed-corn off o' me when it comes to ridin', but you-all boys is got to go 'long an' see fair play."

"I'll tend to that *myself*." The hefty blacksmith rolled up both sleeves, displaying his mighty arms. "Nobody ain't meddlin' with Adrun Vally, not whilst I'm his friend!"

"Here comes a pretty good nag," Ben Akers observed.

It was a good horse, and young Chaudron was getting the best out of him. Chaudron whirled by in a cloud of dust and waved a paper.

"News, Adrien! Glorious news!" he

shouted. "The prince has risen. Paris is in an uproar. Down with the Citizen King!"

Adrien loosed his bridle hand excitedly. Big Sim caught the bit.

"Adrun, what did that feller say?"

"War in Paris, and—"

"Huh! I 'lowed it mought be them Seminoles again. Whar's Patee, anyhow?"

"Far away, in France. Good-by, boys; take keer o' yo'selves."

Adrien leaned forward; Miss Spitfire stretched her graceful neck and flung the miles behind her. Sim Ellis gazed in admiration.

"Miss Spitfire nacherly eats up a road; *ain't* he a rider?" the blacksmith said. Without a word to any one, shrilling on his pipes, Will o' the Woods trudged on in the wake of Adrien's dust. "Thar goes Will. Mebbe he'll git back to-night, an', apt as not, we won't see him here no mo' in a coon's age."

Adrien's glossy hair flowed beneath his soft black hat. Man and horse rose together and fell together in a long, easy lope. They wheeled in at the lane; the whitewashed fence flashed by.

Chaudron's horse already panted at the steps. Adrien tossed his bridle to Gontran, and bounded across the gallery. His father pushed Chaudron through the door.

"Ride, Chaudron! Ride, Adrien! Summon our friends!" He waved his hand as if it still held a marshal's baton. "By this hour the prince is marching on Paris; perhaps the Citizen King has fallen, the empire is reestablished—the *empire*!" His voice rose, and swelled into a pæan of triumph. "We must go—we must *go*!"

Both young men sprang to their horses, separated, and rode, pausing to call into the doors of cabins and to shout across the fields.

VI

AFTER his confab with Ben Akers, Tite Higgins hurried back to the canebrake.

"Dick, we oughter did that job last night, whilst old Frenchy was all by hisself."

"What's the matter with to-night?"

"That young hellyun from Texas is got back. I calkerlate he'll try to make things monstrous onpleasant."

Hullum sprang to his feet.

"How do you know he's back?"

"Seen him at the store squallin' like wrath for Ben Akers. Here's a letter Ben give me—must be from the cap."

Hullum tore open the letter, then sat down on a saddle to spell it out, translating each word into English. Tite craned his long neck and read over the other man's shoulder.

"That ain't no news—he's already arriv. What we goin' to do 'bout it? That's the itchin' p'int!"

"Goin' to git that box!" This was the one fixed purpose in Dick Hullum's mind.

Tite nodded. "We ain't got no time to fool with papers now. How are we goin' to git it?"

"I got it figgered out—to a gnat's heel," Hullum replied. "Come along!"

They rose and saddled. Suddenly Hullum lifted his head.

"What's that?" he said.

It was the tremulous cry of an owl, with a peculiar intonation. As the two men sat listening intently, Ben Akers hurried up.

"Them Frenchies is all a goin' away to-morrer mornin' at crack o' day," he began breathlessly.

"Where are they travelin' to?"

"Natchez."

"Goin' to take the box?"

"Ain't heerd 'im say."

"Why in the blue blazes don't you find out something? Who-all's a goin'?"

"Adrun an' old Splinterlegs; mebbe two or three more Frenchies. They're buzzin' aroun' mightily gittin' ready."

Ben stopped and hesitated. Hullum demanded:

"Is that all?"

Ben kept fumbling in his pocket.

"Don't I git no more'n this?" he said.

"Them Clayton niggers oughter brung nigh onto two thousand dollars."

"Yes, an' we run 'em nigh on to two thousand miles whilst you loafed around yo' grocery. Take this ten; now shut up an' git!"

Ben shut up and "got." The other two mounted and started on. Leading their horses to the edge of the road, the outlaws crossed, one at a time, in the dense shadow of an oak. Up the hill, behind the big white house, they hitched in a plum thicket and crept forward, leaving for escape a prudent gap in the fence.

A dim light glowed from the north window; the men hid beneath it, concealed by

the luxuriant foliage of a climbing rose. Cautiously they peered through the open window. Home-made candles illuminated the room, glinting upon braids and buttons as the old marshal paced his floor in brilliant uniform. He walked erect, with head thrown back like a game bantam fretting for combat.

"Tite," Hullum whispered; "Old Shack said 'twarn't but one thing to do—jes' kill *him* to begin with."

"Reckin so; we ain't got no chance to skeer 'im, that's a fack—sh!"

The Frenchman moved to a dim corner of the room, bent down, and opened what seemed to be a chest. Out of this he lifted the iron box. It was quite heavy. He strained as he placed it on the table, with a candle at either end—like a corpse.

De Valence fitted a key to the box, and the blood went thumping at the pulses of the men outside. Having opened it, he took out something—a shiny something—that lay flat in his palm; then locked the box, went back, and dropped it into the chest. Both men listened; they heard no slamming of a lid, no rasp of a key. He had not shut the chest.

De Valence walked to the door and glanced out expectantly.

"Now is jes' as good a chance as we're goin' to git," Hullum whispered hurriedly. "You grab the old codger and I'll grab the box."

The speculators crept out stealthily. Tite went the other way, while Hullum circled the rear and came, step by step, toward the front. A yellow square of light flowed out upon the gallery, mingling with the paler moonshine. Hullum peered around, looked again, and swore fiercely. Somebody was sitting on the top step—a man who seemed to be eating, for he tossed away a bone. Then a murmur, the sleepy warble of a night-bird.

Hullum lifted his pistol; the barrel shook; he lowered it again.

"Tain't no use!"

Will o' the Woods piped on and patted his foot. Hullum moved, a vine rustled. Will raised his head. Hullum scarcely breathed until the idiot resumed his whistling; then Hullum sneaked around the house, to find Tite Higgins already crouching under the rose-bush.

"What are we goin' to do, Dick? We dasn't shoot. Better knock him in the head!"

"No; can't git close enough to him, no more'n you could ketch a panther asleep. Wait; he'll go away after while."

The little man kept pacing the room, stopping now and again to smile at what was in his palm. Once he stopped, his back to the window, and held the trinket aloft. The candle-light fell upon it and threw off a myriad scintillations. Hullum swore savagely.

"Dang that ijit!"

Tite gripped his arm. Both men turned their heads at the swift oncoming of a horse that galloped up the lane. Behind came other horses, some nearer, some fainter and farther off, as if the entire county were in the saddle.

"Let's git!" suggested Tite.

Hullum reassured himself by glancing at their open route of retreat.

"No, wait," he said.

The first rider, a shriveled Frenchman, with hair powdered in a cue, sprang from his horse, and De Valence embraced him at the door. Hullum and Tite could not understand a word of their tongue-twisting lingo, the Frenchies jabbered so fast, and both at once. The new arrival sprang up like a jack-in-the-box, waved his hat, and cheered:

"*Vive l'empereur!*"

Other voices in the lane caught up his strange cry:

"*Vive l'empereur! Vive l'empereur!*"

The same curious shout came echoing along the big road, and here and there in the far-off fields; the clatter of many hoofs rushed toward them.

"Dick, what do it mean?"

"Hush!" warned Hullum.

Adrien dashed up, and flung himself from the stocking-foot. Other Frenchies tumbled off their horses, wearing all kinds of uniforms. One by one, two at a time they came, by threes and fours, chattering, hysterical, shaking hands and hugging one another like men gone daft.

"*Vive le maréchal!*" one of the younger men shouted.

Four of them picked up that strutting little figure and set it on the table. The manikin made a speech, and waved a flag. Everybody cheered.

"Dick, can't you onderstand *nothin'*?" Hullum shook his head.

At the end of his speech De Valence showed what he held in his hand. Tite Higgins stretched his long neck, and saw

that it was the painted picture of a man—a face with diamonds around it.

"Jes' lissen to 'em yell—gone plumb crazy!"

Will o' the Woods darted in among them, tattered as a scarecrow, laughing like the imp in a dream, spreading his arms and flapping about, erratic as a bat. His bare feet made no sound. Nobody seemed to notice him until he stopped in the middle of the floor and screamed—only once—a wild falsetto, then took out his pipes and began to play.

Like some grotesque evolution in a nightmare those Frenchies formed around the table on which the little marshal stood. Round and round they marched and danced and cheered—marching and cheering, for Will piped and fided like a band when the soldiers muster. Tite listened breathlessly.

"Wherever did he larn it, the gander-shank fool?"

Young De Valence stood somewhat apart, but with such a steady fire in his eye that Hullum wished him safely back in Texas.

The Frenchmen gathered round the table; glasses rose together, pledging their emperor that was to be.

"But we must get news—authentic news!"

"Send to Pibrac," a voice suggested.

"Pibrac! Pibrac! Pibrac!"

A dozen other voices caught at the magic of that name—the Chevalier Félicien Pibrac, late chief of secret service to the emperor—Pibrac, who knew all things.

"Ah, yes, Pibrac!" The marshal glanced about him and selected young Chaudron. "Chaudron, you will proceed at once to New Orleans and find the Chevalier Pibrac, in the Rue Burgundy. He will have the latest advices from France."

Chaudron bowed, lifted a glass, and pledged:

"Pibrac!"

Then he went to his horse. Gontran and Riom commenced leading all the animals to the front.

"They're fixin' to go home," Tite whispered. "Wusser'n a lot o' wimmen; got to gabble some more!"

The Frenchmen did stop and did gabble; then, one by one and two by two, they jubilantly rode away. The house had poured out its chatters, except four of the younger men, who remained with Adrien. Marshal de Valence took up that precious

miniature, with a candle to light himself to bed; and, bowing low, he wished them all good night.

Although their horses waited outside, Adrien's friends still sat around the table, talking and sipping their wine. At every movement within Hullum arose and looked, then sat down with an oath.

"I reckon they're aimin' to stay all night!"

"Keerect!" Tite agreed disgustedly.

Adrien clapped his hands and called:

"Gontran!"

His order was in French, but Gontran immediately led the four horses back to the stable and fed them. Five sturdy French lads sat around the table, talking interminably, until Adrien gave them each a candle and sent his guests to bed. He closed the front door, but didn't lock it. Having lowered the windows, he held his candle high, glanced once more around the room, and went slowly up the stairs.

It was now quite dark inside the room below. Outside, the glimmering squares of light vanished from the shrubbery. The two outlaws stood up without fear.

"Come on," suggested Tite. "Le's go in an' git it."

"Where's Will o' the Woods?" asked Hullum. Tite Higgins did not know. "We got to risk somethin'."

For the second time they stole out from their hiding, moved toward the front, and then stopped. Footsteps came down the stairs; a light flickered against the window-panes. Hullum peered in and saw the young Frenchy, half dressed, shading a candle with his hand. Adrien walked straight to the chest, lifted out the iron box, and went back as he came.

"Thar now!" grunted Tite. "Thar's the end of it."

"No, 'tain't!" Hullum set his teeth.

"What you goin' to do?"

"Foller 'em."

VII

FAINT promise of morning overspread the Marengo hills. The stars slept in heavens of hammered lead. Hullum lay flat and unmoving. Tite Higgins sat up and nodded, with his back against a tree; no eye was open in all that slumbering universe.

Suddenly Tite threw up his head with a jerk that knocked the hat-brim over his eyes. A lantern waked him—a lantern

flickering low against the ground, and the crisscrossing shadows cast by a man's legs as he walked. Riom was going toward the stables; he knocked at Gontran's door in passing. Tite put out a hand.

"Git up, Dick; they're fixin' to start."

Hullum stretched himself and rose, his toilet complete for the day. Without a word they got upon their horses and sat munching bits of bread.

Gontran hurried to the big house. A light appeared in one of the upper windows; Adrien moved from room to room, rousing his friends. The windows glimmered; yawning men stirred about inside. Gontran went back to the stables and met Riom, leading a double team and light wagon.

"Ef they takes that wagin'," suggested Tite; "they ain't 'lowin' to travel very peart. We kin ride all round 'em."

Tite Higgins rode off—his job being to keep ahead and watch the cross-roads in case the Frenchies took a notion to branch off. Hullum would follow.

Ragged tree-tops began to show against the leaden east when Riom held the stirrup for his master. Marshal de Valence, mounted upon that great black stallion, seemed a mere child dressed for some quaint old masquerade. Reining his steed with confident skill, he ordered the servants to fetch the smallest chest and place it between two larger ones already on the wagon. From the old man's anxiety Hullum knew the valuable box to be inside.

The party began to move down the lane, the four younger Frenchmen riding ahead with Adrien. Gontran drove the wagon, with old De Valence on one side, and Riom, on Kinlock's Bullet, on the other.

Hullum hitched his horse in a locust thicket and followed on foot to the end of the lane. There he had the satisfaction of seeing the young men stop and exchange farewells. Four of them turned back toward Ben Akers's store, while Adrien hurried forward to join his father. Hullum hid in a fence corner and watched their line of march. First went the stately midget on his ponderous black horse, and Adrien beside him on the dainty stocking-foot; then the wagon, with Gontran driving and Riom riding at his side.

In the half-light of morning Hullum could not see how they were armed, except that Riom carried a shotgun across his pommel. When the last spectral figure dis-

appeared around the curve in the road, Hullum started back toward the thicket where he had left his horse.

Half-way up the slope he stopped, listened, and clenched his nervous fingers. The darkness seemed quivering with sounds—or did he imagine it? He wasn't sure. The gambler stood silent and shuddered at a low trilling, vague, unearthly, elusive as the winds in plaintive reveille.

"Will o' the Woods!" he muttered, staring in front of him, to the right, to the left, then wheeling suddenly to look behind him.

In whichever direction he faced, the sounds seemed coming from behind. Somewhere, in the haunted grayness of morn, the idiot boy was playing on his pipes. Was that he—right there among the grapevines, with the mist in his hair like dew upon a spider's web? No, he was yonder, perching upon a gnarled limb of that biggest oak, with skinny fingers caressing his pipes, and naked shanks dangling.

Hullum shrank away from the tree. But no, that wasn't Will; the sound came from somewhere else. Eery notes floated up from beside the lane. There was Will—Hullum could almost see him, with head thrown back and eyes uplifted.

No, no, for the music was struggling now from afar off, battling through the fog, choking and dying away. Then all was silent again. Gambler Dick dreaded to stir lest he might stumble upon the lack-wit lad crouching in the darkness. He dare not stay where he was. The pipes rose shrilly; Hullum cursed himself and plunged forward to his horse, fumbled at the bridle, mounted, and tore through the bushes.

Debouching into the highway, Hullum gave free rein to his beast. When the music no longer maddened him, he checked up, hearing the rattle of a wagon, and being fearful lest he might blunder among the French. It was not until the warm sun shone upon his back that he ceased to look behind.

Noon approached; Hullum rode cautiously around the curves, and peered over the crests until Gontran pulled his wagon aside in Ahtoka Bottom, where there was abundance of water and shade. Hullum immediately hobbled his own horse in a canebrake and stole forward.

Tite Higgins wriggled through the bushes and lay down beside him.

"I knowed you'd be some'eres hereabouts," Hullum said.

With experienced eye Higgins measured the opposing forces.

"Thar's six o' them, an' two of us. They got three rifles and two shotguns; I'm skittish 'bout runnin' against a shotgun loaded with slugs. Don't love to git my hide punched full o' holes; hides with holes in 'em ain't vallyble—to man or critter. O' course we could pick off two or three o' them fust."

Hullum shook his head impatiently.

"That's what I was a thinkin'," agreed Tite; "oughter be a heap neater way."

Neither of the men spoke for a while, each busy with his own scrutiny of the French camp. Presently Hullum observed, half to himself:

"Now if I was travelin' *with* 'em instead o' skirmishin' around outside—"

Tite promptly disapproved.

"We done tried that a heap o' times. 'Twon't grind, Dick, no way you turns the water in. The minute you jines 'em, they smells a rat—prompt. In the fust place, Dick, you don't look like what you tries to 'pear to be. Them hands and them boots don't gee with them clothes o' yours."

"What ails my hands?"

"It's jes' this way—when I sees a critter with webbed feet I knows he belongs in the water. You show me a critter with hoofs, an' I knows right away he ain't built for climbin' no trees. Yo' hands and them boots ain't built for the woods. 'Sides that, yo' bristly black beard looks like it's spankin' new—which it is."

Hullum eyed his slender white hands, his homespun breeches, and neatly fitting boots.

"I don't give a thrip; you watch me git to ride on that wagon."

The gambler rolled over, resting on his elbows, and looked Tite squarely in the face; he talked rapidly, convincingly. At first Tite kept shaking his head; then his eyes began to glitter.

"Dick, ole hoss, you got a monstrous heap o' sense. I reckon it's a gambler's chance."

"Takin' chances is my way of makin' a livin'," Hullum laughed.

"When we goin' to try it?"

"Jes' as soon as they starts to movin' agin. Le's get on ahead of 'em."

Acting as energetically as he talked,

Hullum went back to his horse, taking the bridle on his arm. The two men made a *détour* through the woods to where Tite's animal was hitched, then mounted and struck the road again. Both were now in the saddle, riding slowly, stopping to consider the windings of the road.

"Here's the place."

Hullum chose a low bottom where spreading oaks interlaced above the highway. Directly underneath these trees they would be completely hidden. Two hundred yards behind them the road appeared over the crest of a hill; a half-mile ahead another bare summit showed in plain view. These constituted the strategic value of their position. Hullum laid out his scheme.

"We'll fix ourselves, then do our shoot-in' just as the first man's head bobs over that hill. When I squawk for help, somebody will come runnin'. By the time he gets up to me, both of us kin see you gallopin' over that yonder hill."

Tite nodded.

"Looks mighty reasonable." Then Higgins thought of another contingency, showed the whites of his eyes, and balked. "But s'posin', Dick, jes' s'posin' them Frenchies took a fool notion to ketch me; what's to hinder 'em?"

"They ain't goin' to do that."

"Don't know, Dick. Ben Akers 'lows that the young Frenchy is monstrous hot-headed. He's got the pearliest nag in the country, an' is a crackin' good shot to boot. 'Pears like you done laid out mighty on-comfortable for me."

"Well, Tite, s'pose he does chase you. You ain't tied in the big road. Jes' dodge off into Creepin' Serpent swamp, and the devil hisself couldn't ketch you. O' course, ef you are skeered, we needn't go no further."

Tite Higgins never bristled up; that wasn't his way.

"I ain't skeered, Dick; but a feller has got some call to think in advance, ain't he? Thar's a lot o' things which I'd a heap ruther see comin' with my foresights—that's better'n to have 'em hit you, an' then be sorry with yo' hindsights."

Hullum didn't answer; he was dismounting and comparing the two horses.

"Tite, I'd pick mine for the best one, wouldn't you?"

"Yep, got better wind"; and Tite promptly drew his foot from the stirrup.

"Hold up, Tite; don't get off yit. Ride around a whole lot. Make him cut up and cavort, so it'll look like four or five hosses."

Tite pranced backward and forward and crosswise, stopping suddenly and making deep tracks. Then he led both horses aside, shifted their saddles, and mounted the one that Hullum had been riding.

"Now, Tite, mebbe you better scoot back an' squint from the top o' that hill. Stay out in the open where I can see you. The minute them Frenchies come in sight, don't burn no daylight."

Tite hurried back and took his position behind the crest. The sun shone down upon a red, sandy hillside, and Tite's unmoving figure. Presently Hullum saw him rise in his stirrups, wheel, and come spurring.

"They're comin'. Young Frenchy's in front."

"Watch," ordered Hullum, "and tell me when the first head pokes up. Shoot two or three times, then hustle off like a shot cat."

Hullum led his horse into the middle of the road and let the bridle swing loose. The unsuspecting beast stood patiently, with his head down, while Hullum stepped in front and leveled his rifle at the creature's eye. There they waited, motionless as a group in stone, Tite's eyes fixed on the summit of the hill, and Hullum sighting along his rifle.

VIII

"Now!" Tite whispered.

The rifle barked and spat flame; the stricken animal stiffened, trembled, and sank. Hullum snatched a pistol and shot a hole through his hat, which he had tossed upon the ground. Tite discharged his rifle and both pistols, then galloped west.

This was timed to the instant when Adrien de Valence appeared on the crest. Hearing Hullum's cry of "Help! Help!" he leaned forward in the saddle and loosed the stocking-foot. Like a swift brown streak Miss Spitfire flashed along the road, then stopped, prancing and sniffing at the dead horse.

"What's the matter? What's the matter?" Adrien called to the hatless Hullum, who crouched behind the fallen animal, frantically reloading his rifle.

Hullum sprang up. "Yonder go the robbers!"

"Where?"

"There goes one—there!"

Hullum pointed to Higgins, who galloped over the top of the hill. Adrienne touched the stocking-foot, and she shot forward like an arrow. Hullum tried to catch his bridle.

"Don't chase 'em! Don't chase 'em! They'll shoot you from the woods. Dang the fool!"

But Adrienne was gone.

Hullum wheeled at the sound of other hoofs. The tiny Frenchman in the ruffled shirt had almost reached him. The wagon rattled down the hill; Riome with his shotgun kept pace beside it. De Valence halted his massive steed.

"What may be your trouble, sir?" he inquired courteously.

"I got waylaid."

"Have you the wound?"

"Not a scratch; my horse threw up his head and caught the bullet."

"Most fortunate, sir; where is my son?"

"He chased the robbers."

"It is a great folly for him."

Old De Valence cast anxious eyes along the road; then he nodded and smiled as Adrienne cantered back and stopped with a shrug.

"The rascal got away. I should have caught him had he kept to the road; but he took to the swamp." Hullum was picking up his hat and brushing off the dust. Adrienne noticed the hole in its crown, and leaned from his saddle. "Allow me to see it, sir; a close shot!"

"Yes, sir, mighty close."

Hullum stood ruefully regarding his dead horse, when the old marshal asked:

"Whither did you journey, sir?"

"To Mississippi, near Raymond."

"You have encountered ill-fortune."

"I reckon it's my fault," Hullum admitted. "Lots o' folks told me not to go by myself, but I had to hurry, and nobody didn't seem travelin' this way."

Gontran's wagon had come up and stopped.

"I regret, sir," apologized the courtly old man, "that I have not the fresh horse to give. We journey far."

"Huntin' for new land?"

"Ah, no!" the marshal chuckled and smiled at his son.

"Folks say there's plenty fine land in the Raymond neighborhood. I got to move my niggers. Can't find work for all of 'em at home."

"And where is your home, may I ask?"

"Virginia, Hanover County—land pretty nigh wore out."

"Adrien," asked the marshal, "do we pass near Raymond?"

"Yes, father; we go through Raymond."

"It is a happy chance." Turning to the stranger, De Valence added: "Will you do us the honor of joining our party? Riome, give the gentleman your horse, and ride on the wagon."

Gambler Dick Hullum had a smattering of good manners when he chose to wear them. Perhaps they were aped from gentlemen who patronized his faro-tables at the Kangaroo; perhaps they had belonged to him in that far-off home of which he never spoke. With his best grace he protested:

"I am very thankful, sir, but I couldn't take your man's horse."

De Valence insisted, and Hullum declined again.

"Twon't be no trouble to buy another horse—oh!"—he winced—"jes' soon as I'm able to ride. Must have got my leg twisted."

"We can make you comfortable on the wagon," Adrienne suggested. "You *must* come with us."

Riome spread two blankets on the small chest to make a seat for the stranger, and Dick Hullum seated himself in that coveted position.

The party moved on again, father and son riding knee to knee, while Hullum rehearsed the details of his misadventure. Adrienne pushed on in advance, which left De Valence riding beside the wagon.

"I crave pardon, sir, but your name—"

"Lanier—John Lanier of Hanover County."

"It's a good name. Huguenot stock. There are many Laniers in France. I am De Valence," he said very simply; "De Valence, of Marengo County, Alabama."

"Mr. Valence, you have certainly done me a good turn. 'Tain't cheerful to be left afoot in these woods."

Then they talked after the fashion of men who journey far, lest the road prove overlong. Tite Higgins grinned as they went by.

"Durn my skin ef Dick didn't git on that wagin! Jes' lissen to 'em jabberin'!"

Tite trailed behind with his stringy neck outstretched, as cautiously as a mud-turtle looking for something to happen.

The sun was yet an hour high, clear and round and red above the western tree-tops, when Adrien checked Miss Spitfire and cantered back.

"Father"—he pointed with his whip—"there's the loveliest spot along our route. Are you not weary?"

"No, my son, not weary; yet the situation is beautiful—we shall halt."

A grove of sweet gum sloped gently from the road, climbing gradually to an ancient oak which, like a feudal tower, dominated the level lands beyond. A garrulous little brook tumbled down the hill and broadened into a meditative pool, reflecting the tracery of overhanging leaves and the infinitude of open skies. The calm, still spirit of the afternoon and the deep-wood stillness lured De Valence from the highway. Through patches of glare and shadow his glistening stallion bore him up the slope and stopped, immovable, upon the summit.

Adrien took an ax and strode off, singing, into the woods. Presently he came back with two forked saplings and a ridge-pole. Under the branches of a water-oak he cleared a space and erected his father's tent. The servants lifted the little chest inside. Then they unfolded a military cot, placed the master's water-pail, a dipper, a pan, and the simple preparations were complete.

Hullum stuck both hands in his pockets and carelessly looked on. Being left alone in the tent, the gambler tried the chest; it had an old-fashioned lock, well calculated to resist a battering-ram. The wood seemed more than an inch in thickness, bound with brass at every point.

Hullum was still bending over the chest, absorbed in his investigation, when a shadow fell upon the canvas from outside. Quickly he took up the water-pail, and was apparently setting it in place when the little marshal entered.

"We have got everything ready for you, sir."

"Ah, quite so, quite so! I am deeply grateful, but the servants should do all that. You are very kind." Gontran came up and stood waiting. "What is it, Gontran?"

"The wine."

De Valence felt in his pocket and drew out the key, with a bit of ribbon. Gontran unlocked the chest, bent over, and came up with both hands full of bottles.

"Mr. Lanier," the marshal asked, "I beg of you, will you be so kind—reach in here and get two other bottles. There; I thank you."

Hullum felt around in the chest, taking care to note the size and location of the iron box which lay in the bottom. Then he dropped the lid, *failed to lock it*, and took out the key, which De Valence returned to his waistcoat pocket.

Hullum felt his blood beginning to flow quicker. He meant to hang around that tent and seize the first chance; but Tite Higgins called him—with the call of a quail. Hullum started.

"Something's gone wrong," he knew it meant.

Turning from the marshal he remarked:

"I'll go out and get us a buck; plenty of them in these woods."

"Ah, quite so; deer are very plentiful."

Hullum picked up his rifle and sauntered along slowly. He took the road at first, among the trees, then turned hurriedly up the hill. Tite met him in an alder thicket and got down to business.

"Dick, I hates to call you out, special as you seems to be enjoyin' yourself so fine, but it's a heap best to let you know that Will o' the Woods is comin' into camp atter while."

"Tite, you're riggin' me!"

"No, I ain't; an' mebbe he'll call you by a name what won't fit your new idee. 'He! He! I knows you—you's Gambler Dick—I seed you in Vicksburg!'" Tite Higgins imitated the idiot and grinned.

Dick's long white fingers twisted nervously around the barrel of his rifle.

"How do you know he's comin'?"

"I been a glimpsin' him purty nigh all evenin', ever sence I fell back. He ain't more'n a mile behind us, ef that. I hates to have him bust up yo' tea-party."

"Danged ef he's goin' to bust it up!" Four thin fingers, like the tentacles of a devil-fish, wound around Tite's arm. "See here, Tite, we've got a fortune by the tail. *I had my hands on that box—got the chest open.*"

"Leggo, Dick, you're squeezin' the gizzard outter my arm! You'd better found some way to git that box right then. When Will strikes camp the jig's up."

"No!" Hullum swore savagely. "He ain't never goin' to strike camp. What are you here for?"

Tite Higgins shook his head.

"Lissen to me, Tite Higgins: to-morrow mornin' we'll be rich an' fifty miles away; an' we'll keep a ridin'. We can grab that box to-night an' clear out o' here forever—forever, do you hear? Look at me!"

"I'm lookin' at you, Dick."

Tite continued to gaze stubbornly on the ground. Hullum knew that he understood.

"Go back there an' stop that loony."

"You ain't meanin' *me*, is you, Dick?"

"Th' ain't nobody else to do it."

"Ef you 'pends on me, 'tain't goin' to be did, that's all."

"You are willin' to let a fortune slip like that?"

"I ain't *willin'*; but she's got to slip."

Hullum dropped the butt of his rifle and clutched an alder branch as big as his wrist. The branch snapped like a reed and Hullum swore.

"Don't cuss, Dick, you won't ketch no fish; and furthermore, lissen to me: You know I ain't got no prejudice ag'in' a little shootin' in the line o' business. I'd ruther do it myself before the other feller does his'n. But shootin' a loony is diffunt; it's ag'in' natur and can't be did."

"You won't stop that whistling fool?"

"No."

"Then *I* will."

Hullum bolted off furiously, but Higgins grabbed his arm.

"Hold yo' hosses, Dick. 'Tain't none o' my business what you do—'cept to make you wait a minute and give me a chance to hustle. An' furthermore, don't you never open yo' mouth to me about it. By jingo, I don't want to know!"

"You're goin' to leave me?"

"Yep, for a spell. I'm comin' back atter that part of it is did an' over with. An' Dick, when you needs me to-night, I'll be up thataway, under that yonder sycamore."

Hullum tore loose and, trailing his rifle, crept along the edge of the road, with all his eyes and ears before him. Higgins ran off at right angles until he struck an open bottom, where he mounted his horse and galloped.

IX

TITE HIGGINS spurred on in frenzy, like Tam o' Shanter, with the Dread behind him. Not if Tite could help himself would he hear the spiteful bark of a rifle and know exactly what had happened. There would be only one shot, for Dick Hullum never missed.

Hullum went the other way, clutching his rifle-stock and stealing from tree to tree along the edge of the road. His face had gone pallid above that bristly ring of intensely black beard. Listening, looking, and hating, he crept on. His pasty gray eyes shifted and searched until they fell upon the idiot boy.

The road ran circling around the hill, like a vicious red scar slashing into the greenery. Hullum crouched on the upper side; the lower side fell away in gullies and ravines. For the space of a few yards no trees grew, leaving an open vista where twilight fell across the undulating country. In this opening sat Will o' the Woods, dangling his legs above a gully and gazing over the tree-tops.

The witless creature had gathered an armful of pampas grasses and amused himself by sticking plumes around his hat, holding it high and chuckling. His profile was turned toward Hullum—thin nose, bulging forehead, elongated chin. Straw-like hair hung in wisps to his shoulders.

Hullum crawled forward more cautiously than if he stalked a wild turkey. His glittering eyes never left the figure before him, and at the slightest suggestion of alarm he lay flat upon the ground. Wriggling along nearer and nearer, he came within twenty yards. Will had not heard him, and presented a broadside target that couldn't be missed.

Selecting a spot where no overhanging branches or undergrowth might disturb his sight, Hullum rose and rested an elbow on his knee. With slow deliberation he took aim until the shining sight of his rifle covered the boy's heart.

Will laughed—a loud, shrill cackle, and Hullum's rifle wobbled.

"Dang it, I can't hold her steady!"

Lowering his weapon, he raised it again, twice, three times, until the sweat gathered and his hands slipped on the damp stock. Muttering an oath, he stood upright for that offhand shot which had searched out the heart of many a bounding deer. He threw his rifle to the shoulder, sighted swiftly, and fired.

For an instant Will o' the Woods sat rigid; then his hat dropped, he toppled over, and Hullum heard a limp body go bumping down the gully. Will's hat lay where it fell, its plumes sticking up like those on a hearse.

Hullum let his rifle fall and grasped a

sapling to steady himself; its branches trembled violently. He took out a handkerchief, wiped his head, his neck, his wrists. The man's face seemed whiter than the cloth as he stooped to regain the rifle. He forced himself forward, as if to cross the road and see the result of his shot. One step only he took and no other. His feet would not obey him.

"I'm a fool, a superstitious fool!"

In spite of his resolution, Hullum turned and ran, zigzagging like a hunted rabbit, and looking backward over his shoulder.

As Hullum ran, half-bent, through the woods, trailing his empty rifle, the idiot's high-pitched laugh kept dinning at his ears. Once it seemed so close that the fleeing man turned his head and ran against a tree. The blood ceased pumping, as if it had forgotten the way to his heart. He heard again the boy's body tumbling, tumbling, still tumbling down the gully.

Hullum's nerve snapped like a fiddle-string; he bounded into the open road and sped toward the Frenchmen's camp, running madly until he saw the white top of a tent. Then he halted, shivering like a terror-stricken horse.

"Can't rush into camp like this; got to pull myself together."

It was not yet dark, even under the thickest trees beside the little creek. Hullum peered carefully, then plunged down the hillside. For some minutes he sat with his back to the camp, nervously watching the way that he had come. Nothing stirred.

He leaned his rifle against the tree and knelt, bathing his face and arms. Much refreshed, he shouldered the weapon and climbed toward the camp, steadily enough, but with jerky step and furtive eyes that persisted in looking behind.

In Hullum's half-hour of absence the roadside halt had become an encampment. Four white tents loomed against a darkening forest, which already began to lack definition and detail. Tethered horses munched their corn. Riom bent over a blazing fire, flopping slices of ham in a skillet. Gontran lifted a pot of coffee and opened an oven of steaming biscuit. The father and son walked apart, conversing animatedly in French.

Were they talking about him? Hullum listened and caught the words:

"Paris — Strasbourg — Prince Louis — *l'empereur*."

Adrien and the marshal wheeled in their

promenade. Gambler Dick strode up with a swagger, although he still mistrusted this keen little man who had such a depth of knowledge in his eyes.

Old De Valence halted abruptly, like a toy grenadier. He smiled, yet the question came like the crack of a rifle:

"Well, my friend, did you kill him?"

The blood rushed away from Hullum's face. Like a cornered wolf he backed against the wagon and snarled. The tiny old man continued to smile.

"You were going to get us the venison."

"Oh, yes, I forgot!" Hullum grasped the wagon-wheel for support. "I didn't see any deer."

"But we heard the shot of the rifle."

"Yes, yes, I did shoot at a hawk."

"Did you kill him?"

"I—I think so—he tumbled."

Hullum listened to his own words as if some one else were speaking. The tiny man waved his hand with exasperating composure.

"*N'importe*; we shall have no hunger. But, my friend, my friend, you have paleness! You are ill!"

"I do feel kinder sick." Hullum admitted the very palpable truth.

"Riom, wine, quick!"

Hullum gulped a glass like water and straightened himself with an effort.

"Now, you are better. We shall dine *al fresco*. Sit there."

Hullum sat upon the camp-stool which Riom placed, leaning his elbows on a well-ordered table, with cloth, plates, glasses, and tableware. Had the daylight been brightening instead of fading he would have noticed the punctilious niceties that these French people observed at their meals; but it was getting dark, the blackness was hemming him in, and Hullum could think of nothing else.

The gambler talked, he felt impelled to talk, louder and louder, while every innocent little glade transformed itself into a lurking-place for all imaginable terrors. A horse stamped; Hullum twisted around to see. Riom dropped a tin plate; Hullum sprang to his feet. A mile behind him that hideous thing was lying at the roadside or dragging its wounded self to die in a cane-brake.

"My friend, you are better now," said the marshal, laying a hand upon his arm.

Hullum shuddered.

"Oh, yes, I feel considerable better."

Having lingered over his cup of coffee, the marshal rose and made his inspection of camp, as if it were an outpost fronting the enemy. Hullum strolled with him, talking incessantly, for he disliked this deadly silence.

"You've got some mighty fine horses, sir," he remarked, slapping the rump of a Norman gray.

"Yes, we brought the sire from Av-ranches. It is an excellent breed."

"I reckon that stocking-foot mare ain't got the bottom for a hard ride."

"Quite the contrary, she'll travel with her head up for any number of leagues, if need be."

Having made his round, the marshal bade his guest a courtly good night. Hullum watched him as he went into his tent, folded that flowered waistcoat, and laid it across the chest.

"Mr. Lanier, your tent is ready when you like."

Adrien stretched yawningly and spoke a few words to Riom—in French, which always roused Hullum's suspicion. Then the young man strode whistling to his cot. The gambler was unused to early bedtime and could not have slept. He sat alone by the dying embers, not for warmth, it being a mellow night, but for dread of the solitude.

The tents ranged in a semicircle, like a half-wheel, with the fire at the roadside for a hub. Old Frenchy slept in the middle tent, with Hullum forty feet to the right and Adrien about the same distance to the left. Miss Spitfire was tethered almost at the edge of the road and in the direction which Hullum meant to travel.

Gontran had gone asleep under the wagon, but it was evident that Riom meant to stand watch. The stalwart Norman took up a shotgun, stepped into the road, and began pacing his beat; then he found a convenient stump and sat down. Hullum did not relish the shotgun that rested so handily across his lap. A shotgun has scattery ways, and is apt to hit somebody, even in the dark. But Gambler Dick shrugged his shoulders and accepted a gambler's chance.

He wandered idly about the camp, passing several times around the marshal's tent. This was a mere fly, without ends, stretched across a ridge-pole. From the rear and front Hullum could see through it. Old Frenchy slept profoundly; and if he waked—there was the knife.

Having settled every detail in his own mind, Hullum made two trips, bearing his saddle-bags and rifle to the tree beside the stocking-foot. Last of all, he walked directly from Miss Spitfire to the road, making sure that there was no obstruction. Twenty leaps would carry him around the curve in the road and he could laugh at Riom's shotgun.

Having forgotten nothing, Dick Hullum lay down in his tent—to think, but not to sleep. It was probably ten of the clock when he crawled out from the rear, wormed himself along to the stocking-foot, and silently put on the saddle. Beyond the glow of the fire he could see Riom standing in the road.

Hullum then crept back to his tent and lay still, listening to the myriad voices of the night. To Gambler Dick night had always meant a harvest-time when lights flared and stakes ran high; when wine and women maddened the brains of other men, while his own pulses were cold and his nerves like steel. To-night he thought persistently of that idiot's cap decorated with funereal plumes, and kept hearing a body that tumbled down a hill.

"What's that? A whistle?" Hullum rose on his elbow and listened.

"No; it's nothing. I'm a bigger coward than Tite Higgins. I've got to *do* something, and do it *right now!*"

Hullum dressed himself completely and crawled out, knife in hand. Like a serpent through the bushes, he wriggled forward and thrust in his head at the marshal's tent. Within arm's length lay the sleeping man, the chest, the iron box. There was the open road, the swift horse, and fortune; but Hullum dared not strike the blow.

The old man stirred. Hullum took one backward step, another step, and, before he knew it, he was in his own tent again.

"Not to-night," he muttered. "My nerve is plumb gone!"

All the next day Dick Hullum rode on the wagon, and swore at himself for his chicken-heartedness of the night before.

"Twon't be that way to-night," he promised himself.

It had come to the sunset hour, with the red glow just ahead, when the wagon pulled aside from the road.

"We will camp here," announced the marshal.

Dick Hullum's mind was already busy with his plans for the night; yet a haunting strain of music kept whispering at his ears. It became louder and more distinct—a shrilling of pipes that Hullum refused to hear. Then, suddenly, he stood up on the wagon and stared at a bold hummock, not twenty yards ahead. There, on its very summit, sharp-cut against the bloody west, sat Will o' the Woods, hatless, his hair flying, playing on those accursed pipes.

Hullum stood upright, like a frozen man, and stared. Then, with saddle-bags in one hand and rifle in the other, he stepped off the wagon into the forest and began to run.

Half a mile to the rear Tite Higgins drew his horse across the road and stopped the flying man.

"Hold up there, Dick; what's yo' flurryment?"

Hullum halted and shivered with scared eyes turned behind him. He could barely whisper:

"Will o' the Woods is come back—I saw him!"

"Oh, shucks, you never seen nothin' of the kind. It's ag'in' natur'!"

"I *did* see him—seen him plain!"

Tite looked at the gambler and stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"'Tain't no sense in 'sputin' you, Dick; an' it don't make no difference, nohow. The main idee is, you's skeered, an' yo' nerves is gone to ballyhack. We'll have ter lay by fer two or three days. Jes' holt on to my han'; I won't let Will stampede you no more!"

X

FROM the front steps of Kinlock Hall the poplars formed in line on either side of the avenue, standing stiff as grenadiers that flank the route of royal pageantry. Eastward their lengthening shadows crawled across the lawn. Between these long, long shadows ran wavering streaks of light which bloodied the poppies in their bed, and glorified that flower of the sun whose yellow face turns to her lord in his career across the heavens.

Like a line of crouching skirmishers, each for himself, those poplar shadows climbed the farther hill; the huge image of the mansion moved solidly, in regimental front, until it occupied a funereal clump of cedars. These cedars hedged in a burial-ground where mottled slabs lay prone in

semidarkness. White shafts upstarted; prisoned air hung heavy with the breath of honeysuckle and the stifling sweetness of cape jessamines that bloomed above many a departed Kinlock.

On a flat, cemented tomb Dick Hullum sat, with the fur cap of a keel-boatman pulled low above his eyes and a handkerchief knotted about his throat. But Dick had telltale fingers, long and bleached and white, for the sun never shone upon their labors. He refused to "let them hands git dirty an' *stay* dirty," as Tite Higgins constantly advised. Those hands, and the exquisite boots that he persisted in wearing, gave the lie to his rig of a riverman.

Higgins crawled to the edge of the cedars and flung himself full length on the ground. Holding aside a branch, he peered out at the big house. An old negro man hobbled around to the front, leading a pair of saddle horses.

"Dick," Tite whispered, "somebody's goin' away, an' they ain't got no company."

Hullum crept out beside him and lay with eyes fixed upon those four tall columns. Two men appeared on the gallery—Judge Kinlock and Adrien de Valence. The judge went straight to his horse, mounted, and rode some little distance before Adrien sprang astride the stocking-foot and galloped after him. The lover had lingered step by step, talking with Cecile.

Hullum raised on his elbow and spoke quickly.

"Tite, now is our chance. Nobody there but that girl, old Frenchy, and a few niggers. Them Frenchy servants won't come around until it's time to put the old codger to bed. Run tell Dutchy to see which way young Frenchy goes. Hold up, Tite; tell Dutchy he better bring the horses here, then watch the road, an' fire one shot if anybody starts toward the house."

Tite nodded; he understood perfectly. It was the customary arrangement. Hidden by willows, he ran beside a little creek until he came to where Dutch Pete waited with three horses.

"All right, Dick," he reported, when he came back. "Dutchy's lookin' out."

Hullum was also looking out, straight at the house, hesitating between caution and impatience. Nothing stood between him and fortune except three hundred yards of lawn, a girl, and an old man whose neck he could snap with a turn of the wrist.

The gambling public rated Dick Hullum as a plunger, but the profession knew better. Dick had ice-water in his veins, and never flung a card unless the overwhelming odds were in his favor. He scanned every detail of that open ground which now constituted the odds against him, searching for bits of cover which would reduce those odds, and calculating upon utter darkness which would remove them—provided the two men did not return meanwhile.

Hullum drew Tite to the edge of the cedars and pointed out their path, down the slope, to a little depression from which the ground sloped up again, in flower-beds and scattered shrubbery, to the mansion. Hullum feared only the first hundred paces of hillside, where a man's figure would stand out like a fly on a white plate.

"How're we goin' to manage it, Dick?" Tite inquired. "We got to hurry, 'cause that young feller ain't goin' to be gone no longer than what he kin help."

Hullum pulled aside a cedar branch, and his long, thin finger pointed.

"It'll soon be dark. You run behind that little ridge and I'll go yonder way. We can dodge behind the hedge. If that nigger is still settin' on the steps we'll climb into the house by that second window. It's open. I've been watchin' the curtain blow in and out. Then mebbe we'll have to wait and listen a while, to find out where they keep the box."

"That's jes' what I been thinkin'," Tite observed. "We'd have a mighty hard time layin' hands on that box in sech a big house; and we ain't got no time to be wastin' on a wild-goose chase."

Hullum had considered this.

"If that box is hid we'll make 'em tell us."

"Make who? Dick, is you ever noticed the way old Frenchy clamps his mouth? Nobody can't make *him* tell nothin'."

"Make the girl tell."

Tite shook his head.

"No, Dick, she ain't that kind, neither."

The two men had drifted back and were again sitting on the slab. Hullum bounded to his feet.

"If old Splinter-legs won't tell it'll be a danged sight worse for him—and the girl, too!"

Tite Higgins did not glance up. He gripped the edge of the gravestone with his bony hands, and shuffled a foot among the fallen twigs.

"Dick, that's jes' what I wanted to git at—wanted to have some understandin' 'bout it. We ain't got to kill neither one o' them folks."

"Who wants to kill 'em?"

Tite kept looking down at the ground, scraping together a pile of twigs. Higgins wasn't much of a talker, but always meant a whole lot more than he said. He spoke deliberately, hesitatingly, even timidly.

"I knows you purty well, Dick Hullum. You may *think* you ain't aimin' to kill nobody, and I reckon you's honest 'bout what you say. But when you gits het up, an' I see them veins swellin' in yo' forrid, nothin' won't stop you, an' somebody most ingirully gits hurt."

"Look here, Tite!" The veins were throbbing in Hullum's forehead. "We've gone too far; we can't back out."

"I ain't a backin' out, but there's ways an' ways o' doin' things. Ever since we kilt that woman at Clinton, I 'lowed to myself I warn't gwine to do that no more."

"She was a fool," Dick blurted.

"All wimmens is, more or less, same as all men. Sometimes I think I'd be a heap better off tendin' a patch o' corn in the mountains, an' not feelin' skeery every time somebody come up behind me unbeknownst in the big road."

Hullum slapped him on the back.

"Brace up, Tite! Brace up, old fellow!"

"I'm braced up plenty, Dick; but it's jes' this—I been a noticin' that little gal and the young Frenchy a walkin' about, holdin' hands like two chillun, an' a slippin' out to set on that bench in the moonlight."

"I'm goin' to get that box—"

"Gettin' the box is all right, Dick. Them folks is rich as mud; fellers like you and me was made to take it away from 'em. That part of it is proper an' reg'lar; but I watched her yistiddy in a little white dress a singin' an' pullin' roses, an' I ain't got the heart to hurt her—an' you musn't hurt her, neither."

"I ain't goin' to hurt her, not if I can help it."

"Got to help it, Dick!"

"And I *got* to get that box."

"All right, Dick, I'll do my part—see if I don't; but I jes' 'lowed to tell you befo'hand."

The last halo had lifted from the top of the tallest poplar. It clung to the jagged summit of a cloud, then wafted itself upward into space. The edge of every shadow

lost its sharpness; their clean-cut silhouettes had melted and run into formless blots among the hollows.

"Dutchy is come back," Higgins whispered. "I'll go see what he says."

When Tite returned to the burial-ground, Hullum looked up questioningly. Tite inclined his head toward the town.

"They jogged along a mile or so, then struck a lope. Young Frenchy must be in a fidget to get back. Pete thinks they went to town."

"Good! Now run for that second window."

There was no reluctance in the movements of Tite Higgins as he crept out of the old burial-ground and ran swiftly down the slope. Crouching through the shrubbery, he veered around and dodged behind the corner of the house, because of old Mingo sitting on the steps.

The parlor windows opened upon a narrow balcony, with an iron railing. A soft bed of geraniums muffled their steps. Hullum climbed the railing, parted the thick curtains, looked in, and disappeared. In another moment Tite Higgins stood beside him. The two men stopped behind the curtains and tied handkerchiefs over the lower part of their faces.

XI

HULLUM and Higgins kept hidden behind the parlor curtains. With masked faces and straining eyes, they peered out, listening acutely. They heard nothing, but through an open window could see a white figure—Cecile—standing on the gallery at the top step. Like themselves, she was listening—listening to the diminuendo hoof-beats of Adrien's horse.

So still she stood, and the house was so silent, that Hullum fretted and started out. Tite Higgins held him fast.

"Don't git narvous, Dick; hole yo' hosses till the gal comes back. We got to ketch 'em together."

Presently Cecile tossed her head, smiled, and turned back into the hallway. De Valence met her at the library door. The intruders stared at him standing for a moment in the full light—a trim, unbent, fighting bantam, a marshal of France in slashed blue coat, knee-breeches, and silken hose—proudly erect as if he graced some glittering function of the empire.

With courtly bow the tiny warrior handed Cecile in at the door, and they

passed from view of the watchers behind the curtain. Higgins and Hullum listened, trying to hear something of the box; they heard only a murmur of low voices.

Cecile stopped beside the library table. Her thoughts were neither of Napoleon's splendor, nor of England's hate. She remarked quite simply:

"I wish Adrien had not gone."

The marshal inclined his head.

"I desired Adrien to go with your father, so that you and I might talk—my daughter."

"Father"—she faltered at the word—"you are very gentle, like Adrien."

De Valence drew her to him.

"Cecile, do you love my son? Very much?"

"Yes," she answered.

"And you would not wed him for that?"

He pointed to the iron box on the table—solid, shut, locked. Cecile looked him directly in the face.

"I did not know of that until you told me. Adrien has never mentioned it. It is splendid for him to be so great; but I wish it were not true—the thought frightens me."

"Yes," the old man said gravely, "you will have responsibilities when the empire is restored—when this nightmare of a Citizen King has passed from France. It is very sad, my little one, that so many of our grand dames have responsibilities but no happiness. Both shall be yours, for you love your husband." He stroked the girl's hair and soothed her with a mother's gentleness. "In our land maidens are mated as their parents wish—to advance the fortunes of a noble house, to checkmate an intrigue—for money, politics, position. A young wife is safer if she loves her husband."

"Yes." Cecile laughed uneasily. "I'll feel safer when this dreadful box is put away; but I did want to look at them again—they are *so* beautiful!" She took the box and deposited it in the bottom compartment of a rosewood bookcase. "There now! It's safe."

When Cecile rose from her knees, the old man was smiling at her.

"Come hither, my daughter. I have a gift for you—a very precious gift. Stand there, so, with your arms beside you. Now hold up your head, like a soldier. There!"

He took something from his pocket and

flung its broad blue ribbon about Cecile's neck—an oval miniature set with diamonds which trembled and sparkled and then lay still upon her breast. The marshal stepped back, his eyes flashed, his voice rang vibrantly.

"As you stand, so stood I when the great emperor honored me as I have honored you."

These were the first words that the men in the parlor could hear distinctly. Cecile drew a quick breath and caught up the miniature.

"It is Napoleon—himself."

"The emperor!" De Valence bowed profoundly. "Your emperor, my emperor, my friend. After Wagram he hung this about my neck, creating me a duke and a marshal of the empire."

Cecile held the miniature in her hand and listened breathlessly; her eyes shifted from him who had once dominated a world to De Valence, who saluted his emperor with scarcely less of inspiration. Then she studied the painting more critically.

"This is a Capodalista?"

"Ah, you know—you know the divine Capodalista, who dipped his brush in the colors of heaven to paint the soul as well as the features. How could you know?"

Cecile answered, as a child answers:

"Capodalista painted a miniature of my mother when she was a girl. Wait!"

She darted from the room, caught up her skirts, and ran. Swiftly she went, and swiftly she returned, with a miniature in either hand.

"Look, here is my mother, painted also by Capodalista."

The marshal laid it reverently in his palm.

"Yes, it was the genius of Capodalista to paint an angel as the angels paint." He scrutinized it eagerly, then looked at the girl before him. "This is you, my daughter, your eyes, your hair, your lips—it is your very self!"

"Yes," Cecile nodded happily. "Father says I am exactly like my mother at her age."

"She was very beautiful—very, very beautiful," murmured the old man.

"Thank you, sir!"

Cecile dropped him the most bewitching curtsy, then threw both arms around his neck.

The light glittered on Hullum's pistol-barrel and glittered in his eyes.

"Come, Tite!" he whispered.

Tite caught him by the sleeve.

"Remember, Dick, you ain't got to hurt that gal."

Hullum shook him off and bounded across the hall.

Cecile was standing beside the lamp, comparing the miniatures. She looked up with a gasp; two masked men had seized De Valence, who disdained to struggle.

"What do you want?" he asked in a steady and composed voice.

"That box, the iron box!"

Hullum pressed the cold muzzle of a pistol against his temple; the Frenchman never flinched. Cecile covered her eyes with both hands; her slender figure wavered like a lily in the wind, then stiffened.

"Hold the man!" Hullum ordered, letting De Valence go and gripping Cecile by the wrist. "Where's that box?"

"I shall never tell!" she answered defiantly.

"Tell me, quick! I'll choke it out of you."

Cecile grew pallid; those whipcord fingers stopped her breath, then sent the redness rushing to her cheeks again. Her ears were bursting; she heard a voice, from afar off, as one hears above the roar of a cataract:

"Let that gal go—let her go, I say!"

For a moment Hullum's fingers relaxed.

"Now will you tell me?"

"No!"

The throttle of death closed down again. Cecile fought the air, tearing with two small hands at those circling fingers which were stifling her. Her senses reeled; she saw the marshal struggling like a tiger-cat; then she saw a more terrible thing.

The other man, the taller man, swore a brutal oath and struck with the barrel of his pistol, felling De Valence like a beef. Turning, he sprang upon the man who held Cecile. She could feel the blaze of his eyes, a hot, blue-white blaze. Two red, hairy hands caught the fingers that clutched her throat.

"Let go! Let her go!"

The man who throttled her was a gray-eyed man, showing the claws and teeth of a maddened beast. For ages, it seemed, those hairy hands strove to tear the whiter fingers away. Suddenly the tall man loosed his grasp, stepped back, and lifted that heavy pistol by the barrel.

"Let her go, or I'll brain you!"

The snaky fingers turned her loose. Both men breathed hard and glared at each other. Cecile fell in a heap, crawled to the old marshal, and took his head in her lap. A smear of blood crossed the whiteness of her dress.

The gray-eyed man with the black brows bent over her.

"Where's that box?"

Cecile shook her head stubbornly. From the roadway they heard a shot, a single shot; somebody was coming. Then that other man, he who had been Cecile's friend, came and stood with pistol pointed straight down at the heart of De Valence. His blue eyes, his bony red hands, his menacing weapon, his voice—all were very, very steady.

"Miss, I ain't wantin' to hurt *you* none, but I don' mind killin' this old codger. Where is that box?"

Cecile raised on her knees and pointed.

"In that bookcase, the lower part—take it and go—go!"

Tite Higgins got the box, and Hullum paused to snatch both miniatures. They rushed out of the door, and Cecile screamed:

"Riom! Gontran! Uncle Mingo! Some one come quickly!"

Hullum had taken the box from Tite when Uncle Mingo hobbled up the front steps and blocked the door. Down the poplar avenue they heard the clatter of approaching hoofs.

"Get out of my way, old nigger!"

Mingo grappled Hullum with both arms. Without saying a word, Tite Higgins shot the negro dead, and the two white men bounded down the steps.

Hullum lagged as he ran, because of the heavy box. Higgins would have slackened pace, but Hullum ordered breathlessly:

"Hurry, Tite, and get the hosses ready!"

Split seconds meant everything. Adrien might stop at the house, or he might give instant pursuit.

The stocking-foot dashed up to the front steps, and her rider flung himself off, shouting for somebody to hold his excited mare. A small negro darted around the corner, yelling shrilly:

"Dey gone yonder way, Mars Adrun, todes de graveyard!"

"Who?"

"Dem robbers—done kilt Uncle Mingo!"

The stocking-foot danced nervously. Adrien patted her on the neck before she

would let him mount again. His little mare wheeled, and with long, brave leaps went speeding across the lawn.

Dick Hullum burst through the cedar walls of the graveyard and dropped to his knees; Tite tossed him a bridle.

"Hurry, Dick! Here's yo' hoss."

"Wait a minute; I've got to fix this box so I can handle it."

"Can't wait—he's comin'."

"'Tain't but one of 'em. Stop 'im!"

Hullum stripped his coat and wrapped the box, tying both sleeves around it. This he lifted up to Dutch Pete, climbed into his saddle and reclaimed the box. Off he went with a glance at the oncoming rider.

"Kill 'im, Tite, kill 'im—you and Pete; that stocking-foot kin outrun any hoss we've got."

Hullum took cover beside the creek. Tite and Dutchy halted behind the cedars.

When Adrien reached the graveyard, he paused momentarily. It was very dark under those cedars. Twenty feet away Tite and Dutch Pete fired together, point-blank. The stocking-foot reared, pawed the air, and fell.

Tite and Dutchy turned and rode, while Adrien extricated himself from his dying horse. He stood helplessly and watched three horsemen racing off in the night.

When Higgins and Dutchy overtook Dick Hullum, the three swung in a circle, separated as they passed through the city, and met again at the top of the bluffs overlooking the river. It was quick work and silent work, but each man knew in advance what he meant to do. Dutch Pete hurried off with the horses; Hullum and Tite Higgins scrambled down the hillside, gaining the rear of that dilapidated house which faced the river—the shanty out of which Old Shack had watched the Southern Belle when she brought Adrien de Valence to Natchez.

Jason admitted them instantly at the back door—Jason of the unkempt beard and hair, Jason who never saw anybody. Noiselessly he unlocked the door and locked it again. He brought a candle, set it down on a table in the middle room, and disappeared. That was Jason's business—to let them in, to let them out, to bring a candle, to disappear, to say nothing.

What was in the bundle that Dick Hullum dumped on the table? This was not Jason's business, and Jason did not look; but Tite Higgins looked with great curi-

osity as Dick unwrapped his coat and laid the box bare.

"Dick, what you reckon we got?"

Hullum never answered; he felt in the breast-pocket of his coat, felt in all of his pockets, over and over again. Hurriedly, nervously, frantically, he searched until Tite inquired:

"Lost something, Dick?"

Dick Hullum looked up with a white face. "Yes, I've lost that book."

"What book?"

"The journal, *the cipher*."

Tite grabbed him by the shoulders, snatched the coat, and searched every thread of it.

"I seen you with it at the graveyard."

"Yes, I put it in this pocket; must have dropped out when I tied the box."

Tite Higgins sat down and rested his elbow on the table.

"Dick, I kep' a tellin' you fellers, 'twarn't no sense writin' things down in that book."

"Nobody can read it," suggested Dick; but his face showed that he wasn't very sure about it.

"Don't you never fool yourself, Dick Hullum. Anything what one man kin write, some other man kin rig up a way to read it. We ain't the only fellers that kin be right peart at a snap game. I'm gettin' away from here;" and Tite Higgins got up to start.

"No, you ain't; we've got to go back and find that book before somebody else picks it up."

"Supposin' they pick us up, and the book, too—might be a purty permiskus hangin'." Tite jerked a finger across his throat and kicked one foot suggestively. "It'll be a rope an' a tree, and nothin' to stan' on. Better git out o' here, Dick, and let these Natchez speculators do the findin'."

"Hold up, Tite, and think about this."

"Already done my thinkin'—"

"Whoever finds that book, we got to kill 'im."

"'Cose, kill 'im quick." Tite had no compunctions when put to his shifts.

For a while neither man spoke. Then Hullum remarked:

"Th'ain't but one or two fellers we dare to tell; them other speculators would scatter like partridges."

Out of a brooding silence Tite dug up his final idea:

"Our friends is got to hang around and listen—somebody will be shore to talk. *Then kill 'im*. Young Frenchy is the likeliest feller to git hold o' that book."

Hullum was already on his feet.

"I'm crossing the river to-night, with the box."

"You won't make no straighter coat-tail than me!"

XII

THE first fury of the Natchez man-hunt had subsided into systematic search. Men gripped their weapons a little tighter and talked a little less. Every citizen who could straddle a horse and balance a shotgun across his pommel came out to join them. Squads of horsemen loped in from outlying settlements, solitary men rode from lone cabins in the woods—all who had property to guard or women to protect.

After days and nights of unorganized galloping, the searchers divided into smaller posses.

Half the county came to old Mingo's funeral, and from many a pommel hung its coil of rope. Among the horsemen rode other men—frightened men with ears wide open to catch a hint of the cipher that had been lost. They knew that their names were written down in Dick Hullum's book as "speculators" who could spot a valuable horse, run a batch of slaves across the river, or hide the thieves. Wherever the searchers and talkers gathered, these men moved among them and listened, afraid to run and more afraid to stay. Dangerous as it was, Old Shack came himself, riding through the night; but he learned nothing, and went away.

Natchez-under-the-Hill had been raked with a fine comb, dance-house and groggery and gambling-hell. Jason was forced to open his doors and show the dingy emptiness within. Simultaneously with this raid, several suspicious landmarks vanished from the river-front and struck the trail for Texas.

At dusk of the third day, four horsemen drew rein beside the Kinlock gate.

"Come in, gentlemen," Adrien invited his dusty companions.

"No, we must go home." They were wearied out with following a false scent into Jefferson County.

"Then we meet again to-morrow morning. Good evening, gentlemen."

Bullet turned in at the poplar avenue,

his long neck stretching toward his stable. Thick dust powdered Adrien's shoulders and deadened the glint of his gun-barrel. Cecile had watched tirelessly and listened through many a weary hour of the nights. Now she was the first to see him coming, and heard him say to the negro boy:

"Give Bullet an extra feed, and have him saddled at daylight."

Slowly Adrien mounted the steps, shaking his head as he came.

"No trace of them yet," and he tried to smile as he kissed her.

Cecile wore a flimsy scarf around her throat. Adrien's face grew black at sight of this—for it concealed the marks of brutal fingers. The girl shuddered and drew back.

"Please, Adrien, *please* do not look like that—I'm afraid of you. Never mind, dear, the bruises will be gone in a week."

"How is my father?" he demanded almost roughly.

"Quite well—the doctor says he has suffered no harm. Go to him at once. He is very angry, and has been asking for you."

Not even the half-timid way in which she took his hand, leading him through the wide, cool hall—not even his last glimpse of her leaning against the newel-post as he hastened up-stairs—nothing could make Adrien forget what was underneath that scarf.

"By Heaven, I'll find that man, and then—"

Adrien strode to his father's room. Riom was dressing the old marshal for supper, and renewing the bandage on his head. The servant straightened and saluted; the marshal sat very stiff.

Adrien saluted. The marshal shot a glance of inquiry, a peremptory demand for results. Adrien shook his head. The marshal rose with clenched hands and five feet four of wrath.

"Riom, saddle my horse at once! De Valence, to the saddle! Those ruffians must be caught."

"But, father—"

"Do not oppose me. Have you no spirit? They choked your betrothed, they struck your father, and stole the precious heirlooms of your race. Hear me, Adrien, hear me! They laid hands upon a *marshal of France*. I shall have them hanged at once—at once, I say!"

"But, father, the men have gone, no-

body knows whither. Hundreds are searching for them; they have left no trace—except, perhaps, that book."

"Yes, yes"; and the marshal stopped abruptly. Reaching under his pillow, he brought out the book, which Riom had discovered near the dead stocking-foot. Father and son together turned its leaves, scrutinizing the unmeaning hieroglyphics. "If we could only read it, it might—"

"There is one man in America who *can* read it—Pibrac."

"The Chevalier Pibrac!" Adrien exclaimed, and his pulses leaped.

He remembered all the marvelous stories that were told concerning this man whom allied Europe hated as Bonaparte's chief of secret service. From Pibrac nothing could be hidden; through his discriminating brain all distortions filtered clear. Pibrac had fled at his master's downfall, choosing New Orleans as a congenial residence.

"Sit down, Adrien; why so impatient? I have considered. You shall go to Pibrac. He can read this riddle."

Adrien sprang up.

"Give me the book!"

"Softly, softly; those ruffians know their loss, and will be searching. Remember the intrigues for the Austrian cipher—the assassinations. You may be followed, and—"

Adrien tossed his head impetuously; the marshal laid a hand upon his arm.

"My son, courage alone will not avail. You must also have cunning. Trust that to Pibrac! Now dress for supper; then you shall make ready to ride."

After supper the marshal permitted his son a short hour with Cecile beneath the scuppernongs. Then Adrien rode away through the darkness, with a negro as his guide. Not daring to risk being seen at the steamboat landing, he waited at a wood-yard ten miles below the town.

XIII

WHEN the Hundred Days' rocket fell in star-dust at Waterloo, the Chevalier Félicien Pibrac sought retirement, as became a prudent man. His possession of awkward facts regarding royal personages made the ex-chief's absence most sagacious, and kept his memory festering. Sincerely hated as the "eyes and ears of the Corsican," Pibrac was never supposed to have a tongue; else he might have shared the fate of others who gabbled too much. Knowledge meant

danger, and royal arms could stretch revengefully across the seas.

Hence Pibrac's dingy house in the Rue Burgundy, with broken bottles in cement on top of its wall; hence that ancient oaken gate which was never opened; and hence the smaller gate carved out of a corner thereof, with a stanch wicket and a knock-er that was rarely lifted.

M. Félicien Pibrac did not sit as other men; he sat on the back of his neck, deep in a cavernous leather chair, with long legs stretched across another chair, and eyes intent upon a book. Sufficient light seeped through the cobwebbed window, the shadow of whose iron bars crisscrossed him like a grill.

A bell jangled outside his door; he glanced up, but did not stir. Again the bell; he untwisted his legs and listened.

"It is Wednesday; nobody comes on Wednesday. Some lad at mischief!"

At the third and more violent summons he rose like the opening of a jack-knife, with shoulders that habitually stooped, eyes that habitually squinted, and a mustache that habitually concealed the expression of his mouth. This concealment was part of the reason why nobody had ever guessed the thoughts of M. Pibrac. He threw down his book, and shuffled out in flowered dressing-gown and soft cloth slippers that made no sound. By the side door he passed into a damp, paved alleyway, at the end of which was the glass-defended wall and the wicket-shuttered gate.

M. Pibrac remained on the safe side and listened, hearing no voices. Perhaps there was only one person; perhaps the person might be gone. Then the bell jangled again. M. Pibrac pushed aside the wicket and whispered:

"Who's there?"

"I come from the Duc de Valence"—in French.

M. Pibrac started joyfully, laid his hand upon the bolt, then hesitated.

"Stand forth where I may see you."

Years had passed, and Pibrac did not at once recognize that tall young figure in black hat and hair, until there came the added assurance of a voice:

"I am Adrien de Valence."

Pibrac's hands shook, the bolt rattled, the hinges creaked, the gate swung wide.

"Enter, I pray you."

Adrien stooped through the little gate, then stood with extended hand.

"This is the Chevalier Félicien Pibrac, is it not?"

No mustache could hide the Pibrac smile as he took Adrien's hand and kissed it.

"Welcome to my emperor's little Prince of Fontainebleau!"

Adrien had forgotten the mimic title accorded him because of his birth in the palace of Fontainebleau, a lad for whom high honors were in store had Waterloo been won. M. Pibrac forgot nothing, not even the low bow and semiserious homage with which fawning sycophants were wont to greet this tiny favorite of the emperor. As one preceding a prince to the levee, the chevalier conducted Adrien to his study, tumbled an armful of books from the nearest chair, and bade him be seated.

Adrien had journeyed far to lay this matter before M. Pibrac; so he wasted few words in prelude. M. Pibrac listened, and his smile disappeared. M. Pibrac also disappeared gradually, sinking deeper and deeper into that leather chair until once again he sat on the back of his neck, with fingers interlaced before his face like the vizor of a knight.

Behind this vizor his eyes glittered and burned when Adrien told of the blow that was dealt his father.

"What! Strike a *marshal of France*!"

M. Pibrac spoke no more, even at the choking of Cecile or the failure of the search. "You have no description of the men, nothing to trace them by?"

"Mlle. Kinlock describes the eyes of both men, their hands, and their shoes. These details impressed her. Then we have this book, which Riom discovered near my dead horse."

Adrien took the cipher-book from his pocket and handed it, open, to M. Pibrac.

"Ah!"

The ex-chief smiled expectantly. This promised a novelty, even to one who had puzzled through mysterious messages upon which the fate of empires hung, the painstaking scrolls of Austria, the conventional British, the half-oriental Russian, yea, even those labyrinthine cryptograms of Italian subtlety. M. Pibrac straightened up, smacked his lips, and drew his chair to the table, as an epicure spreads his napkin and draws closer to the feast.

Adrien watched him anxiously until the Pibrac lip began to curl in disgust, and he sniffed as if the *bisque* were scorched.

"Can you not read it?"

"Bah! It is crude—bungling—written for ignorant men who must read quickly. Simpletons only write in English."

"What do you mean?" Adrien leaned forward and followed the Pibrac fingers.

"There are no characters for the numerals. See, here he forgets himself and writes out an entire word. Bah, it is no problem which you bring me!" Pibrac tossed aside the book.

"Then you can read it?"

"Like that!"

M. Pibrac's fingers snapped, and his eyes snapped, too, in anger. For a while he sat, humped up, with those vizzorlike fingers spread before his face.

"You are right, my friend, quite right—we must begin with this book. Now go away, go away quickly!"

Pibrac was the only man who ever dared to tell the great emperor to go away, for Pibrac worked best alone. He caught Adrien by the arm and was already leading him through the damp alley, toward the oaken gate.

"Make haste! You will come to-morrow morning at nine—out this way—then we shall have something to talk of. Your hotel—ah, yes, the St. Louis—in this direction, not far if you walk briskly. *Adieu, adieu!*"

Had Adrien been less intent upon getting the puzzle deciphered, he might have laughed to find the little Prince of Fontainebleau turned so unceremoniously out of doors. Yet there he was, alone on the *banquette*, and M. Pibrac's gate fast locked behind him.

He went straight to the Hotel St. Louis, where the great rotunda was already filled with lounging men who smoked and chatted, waiting for the cool of night. Two of them, standing near the door, turned cautiously when Adrien entered.

"Yes," one nodded to the other, "that's the young Frenchy."

Adrien turned into the writing-room. It was quite empty, save for a flashily attired man who wrote at a table beside the window. As this man glanced up, he put one hand over the sheet of paper before him. This involuntary gesture of secrecy attracted Adrien's attention, and he noticed a diamond cluster sparkling among the man's shirt frills. Some prosperous gambler, he surmised—a correct guess.

The gambler wrote several notes, very laboriously, a few words on each, turning

them face downward on the table. A puff of wind came through the window, and one of the notes—a mere scrap—fluttered to the floor. Having finished, he began addressing envelopes, then rose and hurried out.

Adrien dallied over his letter to Cecile and moved to the table by the window. He sat resting his chin in his hands, looking down at the floor, when the scrap of paper—a strip inscribed with singular characters—caught his eye. In a moment he knew what it was.

He glanced behind him. The tall gambler who had written the notes was at the counter, with his back turned, talking earnestly to the clerk. Adrien picked up the scrap, slipped it between the pages of his unfinished letter, and started nonchalantly toward his room. The gambler had gone, hurrying out by the way of the Rue St. Louis with the envelopes in his hand.

"Candle, please," Adrien asked the clerk. "No, I shall take it myself."

Passing through the long corridor upstairs, Adrien felt sure that the room adjoining his was open. He saw the door close gently, but heard no noise within.

Unlocking his own door, he stepped inside and stumbled over something—something soft and yielding and white, like a man in underclothes lying prone upon the floor. He stooped, to find a pillow and a pair of his own trousers.

"What's this?" he exclaimed, putting down the candle and looking around him.

Everything seemed to have been turned upside down and tossed about with a pitchfork. His portmanteau was open and empty, his clothing flung about, the bed stripped, and the bare mattress doubled in the middle.

"Thieves!" he thought. "No, they would have taken those pistols."

A valuable pair lay on the table, far too rich a prize for any thief to overlook. Nothing seemed to be missing. Perhaps the plunderers had been disturbed. His mind flashed instantly to that adjoining room where somebody lurked in the dark; but the door between, which opened inward, had pillows and bedclothes heaped against it. Manifestly no one had left the room by that door.

Adrien stood bewildered, trying to think in the midst of chaos. Suddenly his brain cleared and his hand grew steady. A key clicked in the lock, the knob began to turn, cautiously, without a sound.

Impossible! Those men could not be coming back while he was in the room! Could they not see his light? Yet there was the door actually opening, shoving the pile of bedclothes along the floor. Adrien snatched a pistol, and took a position which would place him behind the door when it opened.

The young Frenchman was very angry and determined. The door opened inch by inch, and the brim of a gray hat appeared on a level with his eye. The intruder hesitated; perhaps he was disappointed at finding the room seemingly empty. Just as silently, the door began to close again. Adrien grasped it with his left hand and jerked it wide open. He confronted a tall man whose eyes gazed steadily into the muzzle of his pistol.

"Come in, sir!"

Adrien spoke imperatively; the stranger obeyed without the slightest surprise or change of countenance.

The man who entered was slightly stooped and well but plainly dressed. He wore a soft gray hat and long, grizzled beard. He might have been any one of a hundred creole planters who sauntered along the streets of New Orleans. His bow of perfect composure put Adrien on the defensive. Waving aside the threatening weapon, the stranger looked around and muttered:

"I thought so."

It was difficult for Adrien not to apologize, but he stiffened himself and demanded:

"May I ask, sir, why you enter my room in such fashion?"

The man took off his hat and smiled. Adrien dropped his pistol with a gasp:

"M. Pibrac!"

Pibrac said never a word, backing through the door into the darkness, and beckoning Adrien to follow.

"You must leave here," he whispered, "at once. Your room has already been searched. I have brought other clothes—be quick!"

M. Pibrac had a way of his own; even the emperor obeyed him first and asked questions afterward. When Adrien had changed to a workman's garb, Pibrac gave instructions.

"Go down the Rue Dauphine—not Burgundy. You will come to an apothecary-shop next to the bookseller's. Between these is a small gate. It will be unlocked; wait for me within."

M. Pibrac lighted a cigar and strolled through the hallway, down the wide stair, crossed the rotunda, and stood at the edge of the *banquette*. Here he paused, paying no apparent heed to the workman who followed at a distance, mingled with the crowd on the Rue St. Louis, and turned down the Rue Dauphine.

Behind the narrow green gate which hung between the apothecary's and the bookseller's, Adrien waited and listened for M. Pibrac's step. He was trying to think, in scatter-brained fashion, what it all meant—the man writing notes in cipher, the sudden and startling appearance of M. Pibrac, the—

"Come!"

The voice behind him was very low, and the hand upon his shoulder gave Adrien another start. Pibrac had turned, and was moving noiselessly through a passageway which led into the middle of the block. He opened a door, crossed a courtyard, and Adrien found himself again in the study. Lamps were burning on the table; Adrien's portmanteau lay on a chair.

"There are your clothes," Pibrac remarked, stripping off his beard. "I breathe again." The ex-chief put on his soft slippers and tied the cord of his dressing-gown. "This night you rest here. My house is greatly honored."

"Why did you come for me?"

"You were in grave danger—exceeding peril."

"From whom?" The young man stopped. He was looking down at sheet after sheet of paper covered with cabalistic characters—the unraveled cipher. "Can you read it?" he asked breathlessly.

M. Pibrac nodded and sat down, clearing a space before him on the table. Adrien drew up a chair to listen. The ex-chief opened a book and took out a carefully prepared key.

"Now for the drudgery," he remarked. "Sit here. Take this paper and write as I call out the letters. It is a marvelous and most bloody story."

XIV

Hour after hour they toiled on, M. Pibrac glancing back and forth from the book of cipher to his key, and calling one letter at a time. It was like draining, drop by drop, a reservoir of infamy. Adrien grew cold and hot by turns at the sordid narra-

tive of negro-stealing, robbery, and murder, with the exact number of dollars gained in each venture, and the distribution of the spoils among the "speculators," as the outlaws called themselves. The entries were like this:

May 22, 1834—Four likely wenches and three stout boys taken from Parson Wigfall near mouth of Yellow Busha. Run down Pearl River by Low Joe and Spike. Hid six days in Big Black Swamp near Hankinson's Ferry. Down the Mississippi River in flatboat with John. Sold to Welter at the mouth of Red River for \$6,400; Low Joe, \$1,000; Spike, \$1,000; Squire Mandel, \$150. Constable McGraw, \$60. Net \$4,190.

Presently there came an entry which told Adrien how four outlaws had followed his father and the box from Mobile to Marengo, and back again, without stating why this plan had failed.

"Ben Akers! I would not have believed that Ben could be mixed up in this."

The last few entries were brief, but with what Adrien already knew he understood that his father and himself had been trailed from Marengo to Natchez, and that the stranger whom they befriended on the road was one of the speculators.

"That dog, I shall know *him* again!"

Adrien wrote on, numbly comprehending the greater purpose that lay behind the writing—here and there a sinister hint, but nothing definite—a purpose far more terrible than individual plunder and isolated murder. Regular as the clicking of a machine, Pibrac called off the letters to the very end. It was done. Adrien laid aside his pen, and the ex-chief leaned back in his chair.

"Now we have something to talk about!"

And they had—something that would be talked of throughout the sparsely settled South, something to make honest men grasp their weapons, and to cause every woman to shudder for many a year.

Adrien sat stupefied, waiting for Pibrac to speak. Both men had forgotten the purpose with which they began translating the cipher—the hope of finding who had stolen the marshal's box. The recovery of lost property, the avenging of personal outrage, seemed trivial beside the supreme horror that was now disclosed. Pibrac peered through his fingers.

"My dear young friend, we thought to detect a common thief, and we have blundered upon a most colossal crime!"

"Do you think it means—that?"

"There can be no other meaning."

"But surely human beings, white men, would never do such a thing—excite these poor negroes to murder thousands of innocent people!"

"Men will do much for money. Here are the names of two thousand speculators scattered through seven States. Under cover of the insurrection they will rob the banks and plunder the rich, then escape to Mexico, leaving the deluded blacks to perish. The plan is clearly laid out. What shall we do?"

"Expose it," Adrien answered promptly.

The old man shrugged his shoulders.

"Nobody will believe. You would be assassinated." Pibrac smiled faintly.

"Here are a hundred men in New Orleans alone—several of them quite prominent—in league with the speculators. Here are sheriffs on the list; postmasters who watch the mails and intercept letters; magistrates who try their cases. So you see, my rash young friend, that any attempt to recover your property will lead to extreme peril, if not to certain death. It were safer to say nothing."

Adrien flushed hotly and sprang to his feet.

"Say nothing! This from you, M. Pibrac? From you, a man of courage and honor? Can I forget that these men have struck my father, and throttled the woman who is to be my wife? Yes, that is a private grievance, and I might forget it—to my own dishonor; but what of these people who gave lands and welcome to exiled Frenchmen when our own misguided country cast us out? Say nothing! Can I forget that those generous men—yea, their women and their children, will be murdered? There will be days of horror throughout this Southern land bloodier than the Terror. I feel that this is *my* country and these are *my* people. I shall expose it, M. Pibrac; I shall put my friends on guard!"

Pibrac rose silently and caught the boy's hand.

"I said it were safer to say nothing. Your father's son could never choose the safer course; but I could not send you into such peril. Sit down; we understand each other now. Let us start again at the beginning and see what we know."

Under Pibrac's skilful questioning Adrien knew much more than he thought—

of Ben Akers, a spy for the Shack gang; of the wayfarer whom they picked up on their road to Natchez, and who so unaccountably disappeared. Adrien recalled horse-stealings, negro-stealings, and murders which were referred to in the cipher, thus proving its truth.

Again Pibrac was sitting deep in his chair; again he was peering through his fingers; again he talked as if to himself.

"Now you can understand why I hurried to the hotel and brought you here. They know that you have come to New Orleans, and they must reclaim this cipher at all hazards."

"Yes!" Adrien interrupted him by springing up and feeling in his pockets.

"Yes, I had a note—did I lose it? Curses on my carelessness! Ah, no, I have changed to these clothes." He rushed around the table and took up his own coat. "Here it is!"

He passed the cipher note to Pibrac. The writing was quite fresh and most precisely done in ink.

"Where did you get this?" Pibrac asked.

"A man wrote it at the hotel. He wrote many notes; one dropped to the floor."

The ex-chief was already applying the key, a very simple matter, for the characters on the scrap of paper were few. They bent over the table together and watched the missive spell out:

Conclave Kangaroo June 24, extreme danger.

Pibrac shook his grizzled head; here was one thing that he did not know.

"This word 'Kangaroo'; it is many times employed. Do you know a town of that name, or a tavern, or a—"

"A gambling-house—probably their rendezvous at Vicksburg. A most infamous place!"

"Ah, so! We start at the Kangaroo." M. Pibrac spoke as if the matter were already settled. "There you will find the men who stole the iron box and the emperor's miniature—the men who contemplate this wide-spread murder." He looked steadily at the flushed face before him. Adrien smiled a quiet, resolute smile. Pibrac nodded reminiscently. "My lad, you are your father's worthy son. Just so did I see him wave his sword and smile when all the world turned black at Waterloo."

Adrien was not thinking of Waterloo. His thoughts raced forward to the barnlike

building at Vicksburg where Glass's Bayou emptied into the river.

"Sit down!" Pibrac's voice came harsh and cold again. "We have two days yet before the General Jackson goes up the river to Vicksburg. We must plan. First tell me of the man who wrote the note."

When Adrien described the man, Pibrac nodded.

"That's Gideon Barlow; he conducts a faro-bank on the Rue Royale. I shall have one thread to draw out while you are gone."

During Thursday and Friday both men worked diligently, and for the most part silently. Adrien studied the cipher until he could read it at sight, and made two complete translations. Pibrac would keep one copy, and try to corroborate its truth by investigating crimes committed in the vicinity of New Orleans. Adrien would carry the other, concealed in the lining of his boot-leg.

This detail cost much anxious discussion. Both of them appreciated the ever-present peril, but Adrien insisted that he wanted the list of names, as he would surely encounter some of these men and desired to identify them. The original cipher would be deposited in a bank vault for safe-keeping.

Meanwhile Pibrac prepared Adrien's disguise, cutting his glossy black hair and dying it to a sandy red. His beautiful white teeth were stained, and freckles made on his hands as well as his face. When Pibrac had finished, there was no feature by which his most intimate friend could have recognized Adrien de Valence, except the eyes of flashing black.

Many times Pibrac came and stood over the young man as he toiled at the cipher.

"Those speculators are shrewd. They will know that you have the cipher and can read it. Else why should you make no outcry when your room is searched? Else why should you vanish from the earth? Depend upon it, my friend, five hundred men are seeking for you—desperate men with halters about their necks."

Adrien nodded that he understood, and went on calmly with his translation. The ex-chief pursued his thought:

"It is insufficient that you should *not* be Adrien de Valence. You must be some one else, some definite person who can identify himself. Had you thought of that?"

Frankly Adrien had not, and for a moment he laid aside his pen.

"When you go among those outlaws they will question who you are, and whence you come. What can you answer?"

The lad looked puzzled.

"Listen, then. You came from the western part of Virginia—it is a country that you know. Virginia is very far away. You shall be a fugitive from justice, and the speculators will open their arms to a brother in crime with a price upon his head. What shall be your passport? We must convince them."

Pibrac turned the matter over in his mind, then hastened to consult his friend, who was a printer. Next morning he went again, and returned with a printed handbill, such as would be tacked up at post-offices and court-houses, wherein the sheriff of Rockbridge County, Virginia, offered two hundred dollars reward for one Tom Beasley, horse-thief, twenty-four years old, six feet tall, close-cropped sandy hair, dark eyes, reddish complexion, freckled—supposed to be making his way to Texas.

Adrien put this in his pocket as a letter of introduction, his open sesame to the comradeship of all reliable speculators.

An hour before noon, on Saturday, Adrien de Valence, traveling under the name of Tom Trotter, alias Tom Beasley, left Pibrac's house by the gate in the Rue Dauphine.

At the levee the General Jackson lay with smoking chimneys, and people hurrying about like ants. Gideon Barlow and three others of like kidney indolently observed these preparations for departure. Pibrac, a fruit-basket on his arm, offered his wares to all who crossed the stage-plank. Adrien never spoke to him, but went to the upper guards and stood watching the crowd.

The smoke grew blacker, a bell rang from the pilot-house, the mate shouted, and roustabouts drew in the stage-plank. Gid Barlow waited until the last moment, then ran along the stage-plank and sprang aboard. He was going to that conclave at the Kangaroo. Adrien knew it, and felt his fingers tingle.

Barlow, in long black coat, stock, and frilled shirt, paused on the lower deck and lifted his bell-crowned hat in farewell to his friends. Adrien saw Pibrac take up his basket, edge through the crowd, and come nearer to the group of men, who returned the salute. Gideon Barlow turned

nonchalantly up the steps, and Adrien looked him squarely in the face.

XV

It was a new experience for Adrien de Valence to be fighting under cover, like a bushwhacker, hiding his face and denying his name. Always he had been "De Valence," meeting every man openly in the consciousness of honor and good faith. For the first half-hour on board the steamboat he lurked in his stateroom, as a rat lurks in a hole and peeps out. The General Jackson turned northward, breasting the current; a shiver ran through the boat—and through the young Frenchman.

"This won't do," he thought, glancing into the mirror. His unfamiliar reflection—sandy hair, freckles, yellow teeth—made him smile. "Nobody will know you—you would not recognize yourself." Adrien particularly hated those yellow teeth, stained like those of a confirmed tobacco-chewer. "Well, that's the kind of teeth Tom Beasley ought to have—no, not Tom Beasley; I'm Tom Trotter. Trotter—Tom Trotter," he repeated over and over again, getting tongue-broke and ear-broke to the new sound. "Mr. Trotter, you can't hide in this stateroom; got to get out among folks, an' live."

Pulling a brown cap over his eyes, he opened the door and closed it behind him. At the very first step into the cabin he stood gasping. Two young girls were chattering on a divan, a third wheeled on a piano-stool, and all three looked straight at him. He knew them well. Many times before he had met their laughing eyes, but now he dared not. He could only drop his gaze and feel guilty. Instantly their gaze passed by him with high-bred blindness.

"If they don't recognize me, nobody will," he laughed; but it hurt him.

Exaggerating his slouchy gait, Trotter moved forward, through the long, glittering cabin with its mirrored doors and golden acorns. There was nobody in the barber's shop, for gentlemen always came aboard clean-shaven. No one was drinking at the bar.

At the office counter stood his old friend Major Cameron, the fat and jolly father of those girls. The major glanced at him with nothing more than the courteous nod that was due a fellow passenger. Tom Trotter felt sure of himself, perked up mightily, and swaggered through the glass door like

a man who had paid his fare and meant to use the boat.

Gideon Barlow, immaculate in frilly linens and shiny boots, sparkling with jewelry, and smiling in new-made broadcloth, sat smoking and gazing upon the river—an indolent gentleman of leisure. Adrien's confidence bore him on, despite the fact that Barlow looked keenly at him. It was more than a passing glance, as if Barlow expected some one to join him.

This was not quite true. Barlow's friends would not join him openly. They would come aboard the boat to meet and pass as strangers. Yet Barlow did look keenly at Adrien, and with eyes that were trained to see. It was merely the gambler's habit of sizing up a passenger and estimating his value for future plucking.

Adrien took a chair, not close enough to intrude, but within reach of that first remark which might ripen into acquaintance. From the cipher he knew many things about Gid Barlow which the gambler never mentioned to his friends—knew even the share of profit that Barlow had reaped on many a bloody enterprise. Being so near to such a man, Adrien's repugnance overwhelmed him. He wanted to get up, to move off, anywhere.

"No!" He stuck fast. "I'll sit here and get used to it."

Contemplating the river with apparent interest, Adrien felt that Barlow was watching him; and so he was, trying to figure out what this stranger could be. Possibly he was a slave-trader, returning from market in New Orleans; possibly an emigrant, seeking investment for the price of the small farm which he had sold in Georgia; perhaps a lumberman, looking for timber. All such people carried money, and had been contributors to the diamond which sparkled on the gambler's shirt.

Barlow smiled and made the overture.

"The river is very pleasant, sir, at this season."

The gambler's voice was singularly clear and well modulated. Adrien opened his lips to reply as he would reply to an educated, refined gentleman; then he checked himself and remembered that it was Tom Trotter who must answer in the drawl he had picked up from his friends at Ben Akers's store.

"Reckon that's so, mister; I calkerlate th' ain't no bigger river than what this'n is—leastways, not in my country."

"You are a stranger in these parts?" Barlow inquired, with a careless up-curling of smoke.

"Ain't never been hereabouts afore."

"Where are you from?"

"Up yonder." Trotter vaguely indicated the far northeast.

Barlow smiled; there were many wanderers in the Southwest who came from "up yonder somewhere," and who would never be definite as to the locality. With the exquisite tact of a gentleman in a glass house, he shifted his question.

"It is your first trip on the river?"

"Yes, stranger."

"How do you like the boat?"

"I calkerlate she must be about the biggest—ain't that so, mister?"

Barlow laughed indulgently.

"No, not the biggest, but as stanch a craft as ever plied in this trade. How far do you travel on her?"

"Up the river, not so monstrous far. Everybody 'lows that Vicksburg is a lively town."

"Dick Hullum runs a mighty lively place."

"Who's he?"

"Runs the Kangaroo—big dog o' the tanyard."

Adrien held his face perfectly blank, and Barlow exclaimed:

"You *must* be a stranger, friend! I thought everybody knew of Dick Hullum's Kangaroo."

"What's that?" Adrien wanted to keep him talking.

"The slickest gambling-house in America. Wish I owned it, and the town with it—like Dick does! If you want to find out what a wonder he is, you just take a couple o' packs o' the dockyments an' try the rights o' property with Dick."

"Must be right smart of a feller."

"A noble spirit—you'll know him. And things are going to get a heap livelier before long."

Adrien wanted to ask what he meant, but the captain came up, and tapped Barlow on the shoulder. He was a tall, thin, bearded man with skin like tough, tanned leather, and a hawk's beak for a nose.

"Hello, Captain Dan!" said Barlow, and glanced up smilingly.

The captain did not smile.

"Hello, Gid! I give you fair warning—nothing crooked this trip, or it's ashore in the first patch o' willows for you."

"All right, cap." The gambler laughed without a tinge of resentment. "I'm not working; just enjoying a vacation."

"Honest, Gid?"

"I mean it."

"Enjoy yourself, Gid; have a scrumptious time, but when it comes to working the passengers on this boat, you better lie low as a barnyard when the hawk flies over."

The captain walked away, and Barlow chuckled:

"Cap'n Dan'll do it, too."

"Do what?" Adrien inquired.

"You see that towhead yonder"—pointing with his cigar to a sandy island and clump of willows in the middle of the river—"he'd be glad of a chance to put me ashore there. Last trip down Jim Dean and Sam Riggs got too greedy. Cap'n Dan ran the boat ashore and dropped them in the woods; it warn't meant for a joke, either."

"'Pears to me like he oughter 'low a feller some leeway to pick up a little money. Rich folks won't miss it."

Barlow nodded approvingly at this stranger who advanced such liberal views.

"Never mind, free and easy times are coming—sooner than folks expect."

His manner was that of a man who might have said a great deal more, but he checked himself and sat tapping his fingers on the rail. Once, when Adrien looked around suddenly, he caught the gambler's eyes fixed upon him.

XVI

FOR miles the boat had been puffing along the middle of what seemed a broad and winding lake rather than a river. Far ahead lay sweeping curves of oak-tinted, scarcely moving water. Behind them the churning billows rose and fell. On either side were glistening expanses of sugarcane, the cornlike leaves set against a background of mysterious forest.

The General Jackson whistled for a landing. Not more than a stone's throw from the river stood a rambling mansion, with vast roofs and wings that looked out through a magnolia grove. It was French, wholly French, and recalled to Adrien his childhood memories of a quiet château in Touraine. Beneath its white colonnade a generous door extended wide-open invitation to the world. Broad-leaved bananas swayed gently to and fro like fans; fronds

of fernlike palms trembled in the air. Back from the river he could see the steepled chimneys of a sugar-house, all basking in the peace of God and the contentment of man.

Passengers lined the rails to watch the steamboat make its landing. Some one mentioned the name of the Château de Clery. Adrien almost sprang from his chair.

"Is that the Château de Clery?" he asked of a stranger.

"Yes, sir—perhaps the finest sugar-plantation in the world."

Adrien felt his fingers tingle. Before this he had not comprehended the cold-bloodedness of Old Shack's plan. The Château de Clery! That name occurred many times in the cipher as a rich plantation specially marked for destruction. Already had the spoilers been set apart.

Adrien looked at the place with his mind's eye, trying to visualize what would happen. Behind the château crouched the low, white walls of negro quarters. There were the people who would be roused to frenzy. They seemed very happy now, working in the fields, laughing beside the river's brink, and shouting to friends on board the boat. High above their cabins rose a bell-tower, the plantation bell whose iron tongue should clang its midnight signal, echoed by a thousand bells, bidding fires to light and blood to flow. Adrien saw it all in a flash; Gid Barlow saw it, too, and hoped for all these things that were to be.

The planter, a kindly faced man in white suit and broad straw hat, sat perfectly still on his black horse. His little daughter cantered up on her pony. Marked for death, both of them! Adrien knew it and Barlow knew it.

In the throng ashore Adrien singled out a short, stockily built fellow who might have been an assistant overseer. This man stood apart from the others, scanning the face of every passenger, and seemed greatly disappointed.

Barlow had been hanging back from the rail. He moved forward and leaned over it, as if something on shore had attracted his attention. He said nothing; he only showed himself and made no signal. The stocky man straightened up instantly and crossed the stage-plank. A few minutes later Adrien saw him at the clerk's desk, paying his passage to Vicksburg.

The boat had scarcely pulled out from the landing when the stocky man appeared on the guards. Without speaking to Barlow, he stood in plain sight, seeming anxious and excited. Then he looked directly at Barlow and walked slowly back into the cabin. The gambler rose, yawned, and followed through the glass door.

The two men were talking together in the washroom, and they hushed when Adrien blundered upon them. The stocky man's nervousness had visibly increased at what Barlow told him.

Three times this happened. At Baton Rouge two men came aboard together. Barlow now had four friends who never talked openly with him. The speculators' machinery was set in motion, and Adrien wondered what would happen if they knew that he carried a copy of the translated cipher in his bobt-leg.

That boot-leg had caused an uproar on the very first morning when the negro porter rapped at his stateroom door.

"Marster, you ain't set yo' boots out to be shined."

Sleepily Adrien handed out his boots and snatched them back again from the astonished boy.

"Marster, ain't you gwine to let me shine 'em?"

"No!" the passenger said, so explosively that the negro dodged and ran.

Adrien sat up wide awake, drilling himself into a caution that must never relax.

As the boat drew nearer and nearer to Natchez he grew more and more restless. He had never passed Natchez without stopping; it was the one place to which he always looked forward, and on which he always looked back. Now, he must sneak by like a rogue in the darkness.

He put all this into a letter, telling Cecile exactly how to address him at Vicksburg. His letter to Pibrac, written day by day, contained every detail of the happenings on the boat. Devoutly he wished for Pibrac's experienced judgment, which would enable him to see things plainly and to reason out their meaning.

The General Jackson had whistled some distance below the old familiar landing under the hill when Gid Barlow touched Adrien's arm and led him back to the gambler's stateroom.

"Trotter," he began, "we've got to be pretty good friends, haven't we? Can I get you to do something for me?"

"Yes, friend, I'd be monstrous glad to give you a lift."

Barlow was fingering an unaddressed envelope.

"Will you deliver this?"

"If I kin do it an' git back to the boat in time—but th' ain't no name writ on the back side."

"I can show you the piace; it's right here at the landing." Through the outer door of his stateroom, and taking care not to show himself, Gid Barlow pointed. "You see that warehouse, with the wagon standing in front? Now, look at the next house—not the one with those blue and white panes, but the next house, where one shutter is open and the door is shut. That's the place."

It was the blind house, the Jason house; Adrien knew it well.

"I kin find that right easy."

"Go straight to it; knock once on the shutter and once on the door. A man with a red beard will open it—a man who looks like a hoss that ought to be curried. He won't let you in; just hand him the letter and come away."

"Not wait for nary answer?"

"No, he'll shut that door again quickly."

"How is he going to know who the letter is for?"

"Never mind that. He'll know, and the right man will get it."

Barlow, to stop these irritating inquiries, handed out a five-dollar gold piece. Adrien first declined the money and then took it awkwardly, for he was really embarrassed, but it looked better to take it.

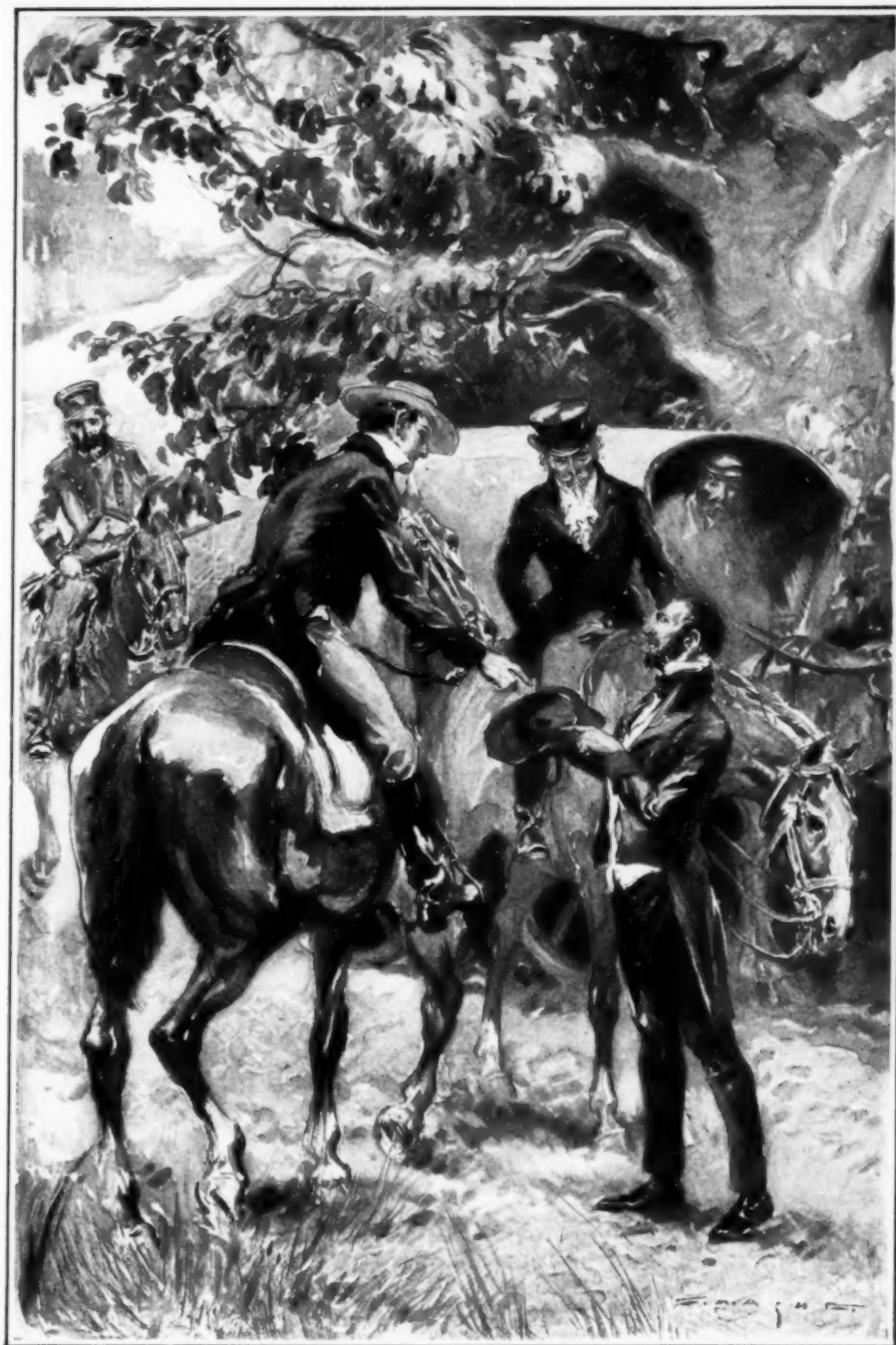
"Mighty 'bleeged to you—I am gittin' kinder skace o' cash."

Barlow cautioned him again.

"Don't forget; knock *once* on the window and *once* on the door."

Gid Barlow's anxiety to escape observation gave Adrien something to think about. Passing forward, he glanced among the passengers who crowded to the rail. Of the four men whom he suspected to be traveling with Barlow, not one showed himself; not one emerged from his stateroom while the General Jackson lay at Natchez.

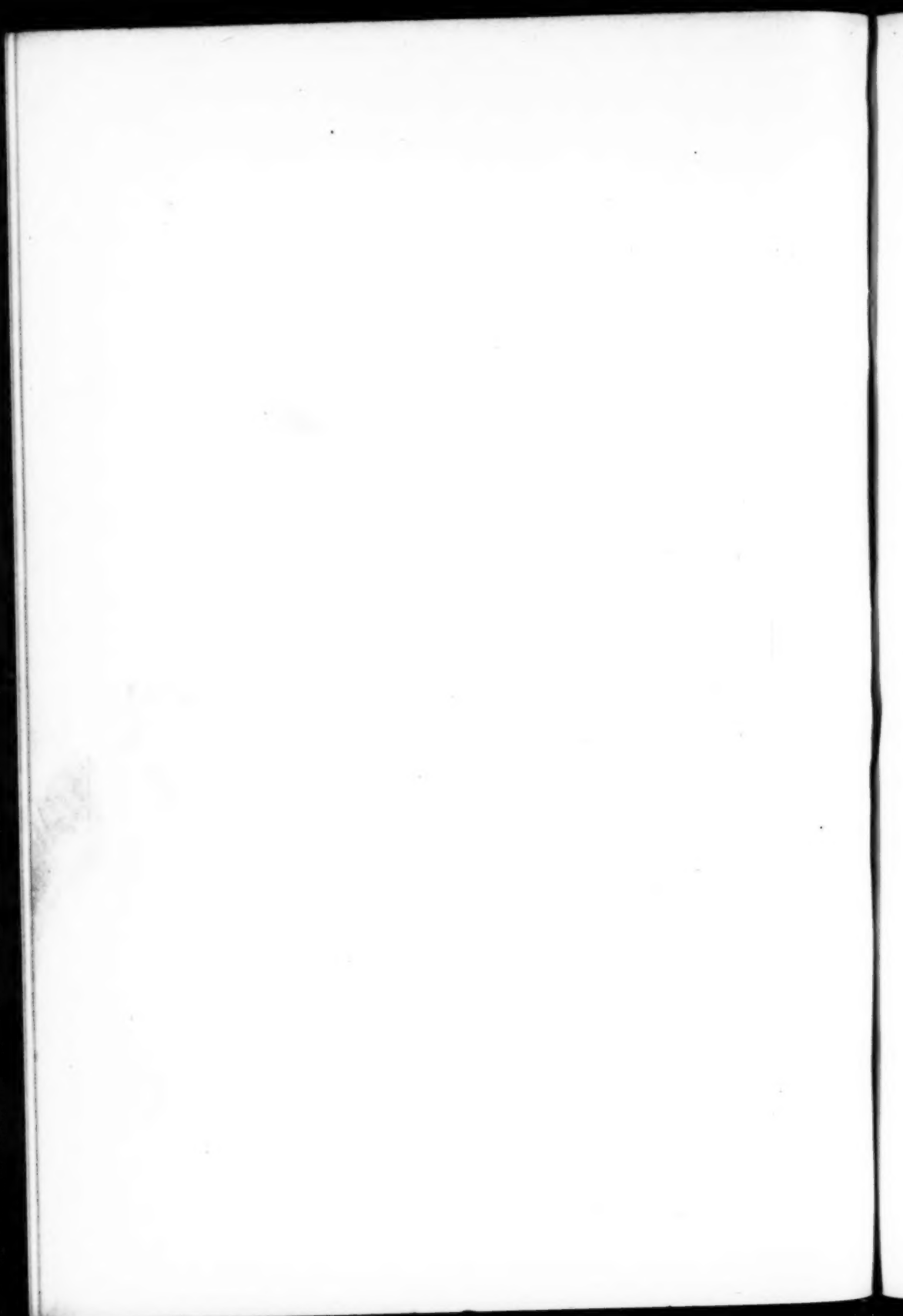
Adrien climbed the river-bank to that sinister-looking shanty which he had helped to search after the robbery. The letter was thin—perhaps another of those cipher notes, summoning a clansman to the Kangaroo. Adrien dared not open it, for he knew Barlow would be watching. Ac-



"ALLOW ME TO SEE IT, SIR; A CLOSE SHOT!"

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cording to instructions, he rapped on the shutter in passing, then on the door.

The door opened almost instantly, showing Jason, with matted beard and hair and the blinking eyes of an owl unaccustomed to the light. Jason took the letter gruffly, the door slammed, and that was all.

The Kinlock wagon stood at the foot of the hill. Adrien had expected that. Pericles always met the Wednesday boat for delicacies which regularly came from New Orleans. As usual, Perry stood at his mule's head.

"Uncle," Adrien tried him, "kin you show me the way to a drug-store?"

"Yes, suh—jes' clime dat hill an' keep on a climin' till you gits plumb to de top, whar all dem benches is at; den turn off to yo' right han' side an' walk an' keep on a walkin' 'til you comes to a drug-sto'. Thankee, suh"—for the unexpected two-bit piece which fell into his palm. "Huh, dat white feller gives money to niggers same as a gent'mun!"

After his visit up-town, Adrien returned to the boat with the elation of a warrior who has tried on his new armor and found it invulnerable. At the post-office he came face to face with Judge Kinlock and met not the slightest sign of recognition. At the drug-store corner he passed among his friends and heard their conversation, as any stranger might have done.

Adrien wished he could try his father and Cecile—Cecile, most of all, but she would know him by his laugh.

"Nobody in the world could recognize me now, except Will o' the Woods," he assured himself exultantly.

This was more than an experience; it was a victory of real value. Fortified and encouraged, he lost that insecure sense of hiding out, of being on the defensive. He felt at ease, and could think clearly.

Thinking clearly, he planned to make Gideon Barlow his sponsor at the Kangaroo, so that Tom Beasley would be received among the speculators as a duly authenticated horse-thief. As Adrien now considered it, from every angle, the difficulties dwindled. He knew Barlow's moral fiber, and had no fear of approaching the wrong man. Every day they talked together with the familiarity of fellow passengers; it would be very simple to bring up the subject, especially as the gambler's conversation frequently skirted along criminal edges. If Barlow came to believe that

he was dealing with a man of his own kidney—a willing tool and a cheap tool—the rest would follow.

After supper in the cabin, Barlow sauntered out to the forward guards with his cigar, and Adrien followed.

"Mr. Barlow," he began clumsily, "I calkerlate I mought feel a heap better if you'd take back this five dollars. It don't look real friendly to charge for doing a little thing like this."

The glow from Barlow's cigar lighted up his face.

"That's all right, Trotter; didn't you say you were scarce of cash?"

"Yes," he admitted, "I need the money monstrous bad."

"Then keep it. I'm glad to help you."

"Besides that"—Adrien creased and uncreased the cap upon his knee—"more'n that, I aims to git yo' he'p about some p'tickler business—some mighty private business."

"One—two—three—fire!" Barlow settled back to listen.

"I wants another chance; an' if them folks is on the lookout for me at Vicksburg I won't get no chance."

"What folks? Who do you know at Vicksburg?"

"Not a human; that's why I'm a goin' there."

"Who is looking out for you?"

"You see, it's jest this way—" Adrien fumbled in his pocket, and then, as if following a sudden impulse, thrust a paper toward the other man—a soiled and crumpled handbill. Before letting go of it he leaned forward and asked: "Mr. Barlow, you wouldn't tell on another feller, would you?"

"No, there ain't many of us can afford to have other fellers tellin' on us."

Barlow stepped over to the glass door, where he could get a light on the paper. From end to end the gambler read the handbill through twice.

"Whew!" he whistled softly. "That's you by metes and bounds, same as a surveyor's notes."

"Got me down complete, didn't they, mister? Hock an' hoof an' hide—I'd know any hoss, the world over, from that."

"No mistake! Throw that cap in the river and get you a hat; but you can't throw away your freckles and sandy hair—and those teeth. What do you want me to do?"

Barlow shot the question so suddenly that Adrien found no ready answer. He had only sought a pretext to show Barlow that paper.

"I kin git work, if them sheriffs let me alone. In Virginny they got them notices tacked up at ev'ry post-office an' co't-house. I couldn't stop nowhar. I pulled that'n down."

The handbill was weather-stained, and Barlow noticed the tack-holes in the corners. Pibrac never forgot a detail.

"What can I do for you?"

"I jes' want to set my mind easy that th' ain't none o' them tarnal papers stuck up in Vicksburg, an' I'm skeered to go look for myself."

"Sheriffs never bother to catch anybody in Vicksburg. Speculators got that town by the tail—they know all the quirks o' the law, same as a almanac."

Adrien could hardly sit in his chair at the word "speculators," which was so constantly used in the cipher book.

"Speculators? What's that?" he asked so abruptly as almost to put Barlow on his guard.

"They're the boys who pick up loose horses and other things—noble spirits. They live like lords—come to Vicksburg and New Orleans to spend their money."

"And nobody bothers 'em?"

"Not where they have friends and stan' together."

"I ain't got no friends an' can't tarry nowhar—not where them pesky papers is hanging up with folks a readin' 'em and squintin' cross-eyed at me."

Barlow resumed his chair and propped both feet against the rail for a long talk.

"Well, Beasley—"

"Sh!" Adrien clutched his arm. "Don't say that."

"It's all the same in Vicksburg. Foller me an' you'll wear diamonds. Nobody can touch you—not by a jugful. If the sheriffs has got anything awkward against you, some of our boys can fix it up. Virginia's mighty far off."

"Texas is a heap more further, ain't it, an' safer?"

Barlow laughed outright.

"That's what every young feller thinks the minute he gets tangled up in his first horse scrape. You can kill a man in Texas and not have a lawsuit; but if you steal a horse—oh, well, there's nothin' to bring a lawsuit about, it's just a rope an' a limb.

Better stick to these parts, where speculation is a pleasant pastime."

Barlow talked on at random, holding the handbill between his fingers, with his eyes fixed upon it as if his mind were also there. Twice Adrien reached out to reclaim the paper, and the gambler drew it away. Presently, ignoring Adrien's gesture, Barlow slipped it into his own pocket.

"Hole up, friend!" Adrien protested. "You done put my paper in yo' pocket."

"I know it."

"I wants it back."

"I'll keep it safe, don't you worry."

"But that's my paper, and I want it." Adrien felt his voice and temper rising.

"No," the gambler answered coolly; "it is now mine."

"Yourn?"

"Yes, what goes into my pocket belongs to me." Barlow crossed one leg over the other. "Let me tell you a secret," he explained graciously. "It's monstrous wise for sportsmen to know all they can about each other an' *be able to prove it.*"

The suggestion took Adrien squarely between the eyes.

"Do you mean—"

Barlow waved his hand airily.

"No, I don't mean to turn you over to the sheriff, but I *could*—you understand that—and it's very kind of me to protect you. *That's what makes good friends stick to each other.*"

Adrien's breath came quick; his fingers clenched. He looked out upon the starlit river, where a hundred lights went dancing toward the shore. Barlow leaned forward with elbows on his knees and whispered:

"To-morrow we get to Vicksburg. That night you will come to the Kangaroo. Now, I *know* you will come!"

XVII

LONG before Vicksburg was Vicksburg, a few pioneer cabins caught their precarious footing against her western hillside. Trade from the flatboats coaxed them gradually down the slope until they ranged themselves on a low strip of land fronting the river. Built of rough, unpainted boards, a single season would turn each new house into a dilapidated shanty; and so they remained from generation to generation. Ever since the yellow floods have overflowed these shanties; ever since men have known the place and legend spoken of it, there has been scanty change along "the Commons."

From St. Louis to the Gulf, steamboat-men whispered gruesome tales of things that happened there. During the flush times of river glory, opulent planters stepped ashore from floating palaces of white and gold. Gamblers plied their calling in gorgeous rooms; men died with their boots on, and were carried, feet foremost, to the river. There was a picturesque glamour about this rendezvous of riverfolk, its boisterous vaudeville and its swift-enacted tragedy.

A dozen screaming whistles welcomed the General Jackson as she edged carefully between other steamboats and thrust her prow into a vacant patch of mud. Barlow's four companions immediately left the boat, each for himself, and each taking a different direction. As Barlow passed down the steps he whispered to Adrien:

"To-night—at the Kangaroo."

Adrien traveled in what his father might have called "light marching order." He needed only to pick up his saddle-bags and step ashore.

At the end of the stage-plank he met a pair of eyes, too big and wistful and blue for the haggard young face behind them. A hatless boy stood watching every passenger with a gleam of hope and patient disappointment. As Adrien came opposite, he saw the lad's thin elbow thrown up into the air with the involuntary gesture of one who is always dodging. A heavy stick fell, the boy started to run, and a big hand twisted itself into his collar.

"Ketched yer again, Skinny, searchin' fer somebody to take ye away!"

"Please, please don't beat me, Grogan! I ain't runnin' away."

The boy cringed and writhed. Grogan bristled like an infuriated bulldog, and his bludgeon waved in mid air. Adrien seized it.

"Don't hit the boy with that stick; you'll kill him!"

"Don't care ef I do. Leggo—'tain't none o' yo' bizness."

"You must not hit him with that stick."

Skinny squirmed like an eel. Grogan tried to hold him with one hand, while Adrien wrenched his bludgeon from the other and hurled it into the river. Skinny burst the collar of his shirt and ran limping along the river-bank. Adrien had no time to watch the boy. Grogan wheeled with a knife in his hand and crouched for a spring.

"Wake, snakes! Day's a breakin'!"

But Grogan knew better than to spring at the muzzle of a leveled pistol with unwavering eyes behind it.

"Drop that knife," the steady voice commanded. "Drop it."

Grogan dropped it; anybody would. No one in the crowd attempted to interfere. Men on the Commons made it a rule to mind their own business and keep out of the line of fire.

Adrien kicked Grogan's knife into a mud-hole, picked up his carpet-sack, and backed off, never losing sight of his adversary, who got redder in the face as the crowd commenced to jeer.

"Hey, Jimmy, raised a hurry-cane that time, didn't you? Come purty nigh gettin' yo' crop laid by! Kinder aggravokin', ain't it?"

Grogan made no answer. He recovered his knife, wiped off the mud, and stuck it back in his bosom. Then he straightened up and glared after Adrien, who went climbing the long, steep hill.

"This ain't the las' day o' the world," he muttered. "I'll git my chanst!"

As a man climbs the hill at China Street he finds plenty of time to think and puff—mainly to puff, but Adrien was thinking and smiling.

"I must be more careful in getting off steamboats. Too much depends on my keeping out of trouble."

But he thought of the emaciated boy with those pleading blue eyes, and was glad that Skinny got no beating. At Washington Street, on top of the hill, he paused. Before this, whenever he visited Vicksburg, he had bunked with Lynn Worthington in the little room behind Lynn's law office. Now, he must go to a hotel or boarding-house, preferably a boarding-house, which suited his apparent character and offered better opportunities for coming close to men of the stripe with whom he wished to mingle. He saw a sign that read:

MRS. YARBOR

Board and Lodging

Meals 25 cents.

Mrs. Yarbor's establishment was much frequented by jurors and witnesses during the sessions of court—a community clearing-house for information and gossip. The ponderous landlady met Adrien on the gallery, like a jelly figure just beginning

to melt. He hoped that her waist-string mightn't pop and let the woman scatter.

"Stranger, I reckon I kin make room fer ye at a pinch. Fetch yo' carpet-sack."

She led him back to the dining-room, followed by her shambling apology for a husband. A saddle-colored slattern chewed on a snuff-stick as she spread a checkered cloth over a long table. Mrs. Yarbor made a businesslike examination of the floor, which was marked off in squares.

"The corners is all took; here, Sim, mark a place for the stranger onderneath this here window."

Her husband took a bit of chalk from his pocket and laid out another parallelogram on the floor.

"What's that for?" Adrien inquired.

"That's yo' bunk. Got ary quilt?"

"No."

"We kin rig you up a quilt and a piller—two bits extry. At night Liza moves the table on t'other side, and menfolks sleeps on this side; every feller in his own place, so th' ain't no scrougin'. Nobody can't do no better fer ye in this town. New folks pilin' in heap faster than they kin slap up houses to sleep 'em. Dollar a day, strickly in advance. No Mexikin money took. Thanky! Now, set yo' carpet-sack down in yo' own place, right up ag'in' the wall. Nobody won't bother it. Dinner at twelve, supper at six, breakfast at six. Git in quick, 'cause thar's a mighty big crowd. Fellers what sleeps in the dinin'-room ain't 'lowed to be late fer breakfast."

Mrs. Yarbor expounded the house rules, and Sim Yarbor did the agreeing. She kept talking and Sim kept agreeing until their new boarder backed himself off the front gallery into the street.

This left Adrien free, with a pistol in his breast pocket, the cipher writing in his boot, and the world to begin work upon. His trouble would be to make a start, to catch the end of a string and keep pulling.

In Vicksburg he seemed much farther from his object than when talking with Pibrac in New Orleans. Pibrac had made everything so plain, so simple. If he were here Adrien could go straight to the heart of what he wanted.

The first thing Adrien wanted was a letter from Cecile, so he went straight to Lynn Worthington's office. The dumpy little building was unchanged—two rooms, one story, with brick laid between wooden studding. Adrien stepped in from the

street. Lynn's papers lay scattered in their incorrigible confusion, an unfinished letter on his desk; but no Lynn. There was nobody in the back room where his friend usually slept.

"I'll take a look around town and then come back," Adrien said to himself, and wandered up the street.

It was a very still day in June, hot and drowsy. Few people moved about; flies buzzed undisturbed beneath the mulberry-trees. A young man sat alone on the hotel gallery, with linen-clad legs resting across a bench.

"Have a seat, sir?" he beckoned amiably. Adrien took the vacant chair. "You are a newcomer?"

The inquiry was most courteous, in a tone of kindly interest toward any wayfarer who claimed the hospitality of the young man's town. Adrien was glad to find him talkative, giving the gossip of home folks and pointing out notables.

"There go Mr. Prentiss and Mr. Foote, arm in arm—and I've seen them fight two duels—two duels, sir! Ah, La Dame Volupté!" he added under his breath, as a magnificent-looking woman passed.

The light-haired, full-breasted, overdressed creature turned her unshrinking eyes upon them, neither modestly nor brazenly, but quite as a matter of course, La Dame Volupté being accustomed to the stares of men. She swung across the street, not with the mincing gait of one who is city-bred, but with the stride of a vigorous country girl. Her face was that of a young girl. In fact, La Dame Volupté was very young. She disappeared into the milliner's shop directly opposite.

"Who is that?" Adrien asked.

"Dick Hullum's wife—not the wife he had last year, however, or the lady of the year before."

"Who is Dick Hullum?"

"Proprietor of the Kangaroo—an insolent, desperate fellow. What's that?"

It was a voice from across the street—a woman's voice, a single voice, yet lifted in so many inflections of fury that it sounded like a dozen. La Dame Volupté flounced out of the milliner's doorway and stood with her back toward the street.

"Why can't I come into your shop? Why can't I buy a hat? I'm a lady, you little frizzle-headed hussy! I can buy you an' sell you!" Her own words seemed to madden the woman. "You needn't blink

at me with them skim-milk eyes of yourn, that look like peeled onions swimmin' in they own juice. You ain't bluffin' nobody. Buckle back your ears ef you don't aim to hear what I got to say, 'cause I'm goin' to do some talkin'!"

La Dame Volupté shouted one foul epithet after another until the young man on the hotel gallery got up from his chair.

"Can't stand that!"

He hurried across the street and caught the frenzied woman's arm.

"My dear lady, I wouldn't talk that way."

"Min' yo' own business, you little grin-nin' whippersnapper! You're talkin' to Dick Hullum's wife. Turn go my arm! Turn go or I'll give you a taste of it!" Which she did.

To Adrien's astonishment this tongue-lashing never ruffled the young man; his manner remained soothing, even deferential, but his grasp held firm, and he led La Dame Volupté to the corner. There she jerked loose.

"I'm goin' to git Dick Hullum!"

Adrien had not seen the first target of her billingsgate until Miss Wyndham's pale face appeared in the doorway.

"Oh, Dr. Bodley," she called, "please do not get into a difficulty on my account!"

The young physician turned with hat in hand and bowed.

"I assure you, Miss Wyndham, there will be no difficulty. It is regrettable that you should be annoyed."

The prim little maiden lady stood erect in her shop door, then vanished with a rustle of black silk. Dr. Bodley tactfully refrained from mentioning the undiscussable subject. He walked back thoughtfully and dropped into his chair.

"Confounded outrage, sir—a creature like that insulting a lady. Those gamblers are sowing the wind."

The young physician was visibly incensed, yet said no more until a fine-looking pointer came trotting past the corner.

"Here's Dick Hullum's dog," he remarked.

Almost immediately La Dame Volupté appeared, walking aggressively, half dragging a man by the arm. Adrien felt sure he had seen this man before—perhaps in New Orleans or Mobile. Two other flashily dressed and bejeweled gamblers followed them. The four crossed the street diagonally to Miss Wyndham's shop.

"Go in there, Dick, an' tell that wench I'm to git *anything I want*, or you'll know the reason why!"

The big gambler had no sooner set foot upon the threshold than Miss Wyndham confronted him—a fragile wisp of a lady, pale, erect, and unfearing. Hullum faltered and appealed to the wrathful Maggie Belle.

"Sock it to her, Dick; ef you don't I will!"

Hullum's two friends had their hands full keeping Maggie Belle out of the shop. This left Dick to face Miss Wyndham, who had not opened her lips.

Dr. Bodley rose, hurried over, and touched one of the gamblers on the arm.

"Mr. North, I beg your pardon—"

Maggie Belle whirled upon him.

"That's the feller, Dick—he grabbed me, the runty little—"

Dick Hullum sprang out of the milliner's shop, glad to escape the disconcerting Miss Wyndham.

"What did he do to you, Maggie Belle?"

"Grabbed my arm, cuffed me around like a dog, jerked me to the corner, and—"

The doctor spoke quickly.

"I beg to correct you, madam; I merely led you away."

"I'll learn you to lay hands on Maggie Belle!" Dick Hullum burst out.

Adrien bounded to his feet. He had heard that voice before, and felt that he had cause to dislike the man who owned it. His searching gaze fastened itself upon a showily dressed gambler—a clean-shaven, black-haired man, with very white skin. The face baffled him; the name meant nothing, for the excellent reason that Hullum had never once mentioned his own name in the cipher book.

De Valence ransacked his mind while Dick Hullum took two or three steps toward Dr. Bodley with hand upraised. Both the other gamblers slipped out their pistols and held them ready. De Valence hesitated, he had determined not to jeopardize important affairs by mixing in another brawl, yet he could not stand by and see a gentleman murdered by ruffians. From that distance he might easily have pinked any given button on any of their coats; but a single shot would do no good, and Dr. Bodley's coolness reassured him.

"You have the advantage; I am unarmed, but I warn you not to strike," the doctor said.

Dick Hullum gradually lowered his threatening hand.

"Maggie Belle, what must I do to him?"

Dr. Bodley was a slight man, distinctly undersized; but he stood gamely, and the woman wavered.

"Never mind, Dick, you needn't beat him—not this time. Jes' tell him what you think of him."

Dick Hullum did that, fluently, violently, completely, until Maggie Belle announced that her soul had been set at peace. The young physician looked Hullum straight in the eye, and not a muscle quivered. The woman breathed hard; her bosom rose and fell, like the wake of a steamboat.

"Come along, Dick, le's go; these pore white folks aggravates me."

With a toss of her hand, with much shaking of plumes and swishing of skirts, Maggie Belle thrust her arm through Dick Hullum's. The other gamblers trailed behind like a body-guard. De Valence kept his eye on Dick Hullum, but could not place him—not yet. Some day the memory would come bubbling up, clear as spring water.

Dr. Bodley moved back, unhurried, gazing upon the ground in deep thought, but not in mortification. There was such dignity in the young man's self-control that Adrien felt uplifted. Involuntarily he took off his hat.

"Nobly done, sir, nobly!"

"We are a patient people, sir; no other community would stand that."

"What will you do?"

The doctor sat meditating, and made no answer. Presently he began to speak as if to himself.

"Affairs went badly in England; people groaned beneath an overload of taxes, and chafed at the profligate favorites of King Charles. The nation seethed with discontent, and yet no freeman lifted his arm to strike. Some one asked the question of Oliver Cromwell: 'What will the people do?' Mark you, sir, old Noll's reply: '*Affairs must get much worse before they get any better.*' Our forefathers were patient men, up to a certain point."

There were other men in Vicksburg not so gentle or forbearing. Rumor, with her thousand lips, whispered of the insult to Miss Wyndham and Dr. Bodley. Impatient ones began to gather in front of the hotel, demanding that something be done

—done at once. Fiery speakers counseled an immediate descent upon the Kangaroo, to burn the pest-hole and drive out its horde of rats.

The street filled rapidly with armed men, well trained to the use of weapons. They talked in couples and in groups, recalling many an outrage—ladies who had been insulted at the church doors—young men lured to the gaming-table, robbed, and murdered. Murmurs of protest swelled into a roar of wrath.

Adrien looked into those determined faces and wondered what might happen if they knew that these same gamblers were planning a slave insurrection, under cover of which Vicksburg was to be sacked. Would the excited public believe what he could tell them? No, the tale was too wild, too incredible; he must get the proof.

Suddenly a young man sprang upon a box and shouted:

"Come on, men—let's go and burn 'em out!"

Adrien couldn't see the speaker's face, but instantly recognized the voice of Lynn Worthington. A hundred citizens announced themselves as ready, and chose their willing leaders. Then Dr. Bodley stepped to the edge of the gallery and lifted his hand.

"Men of Vicksburg, let us do things decently and in order, and do nothing by halves. We must act with reason, and not with passion; leave nothing undone, and nothing to regret. I hereby call a mass-meeting at the court-house to-night at eight o'clock. See to it that every honest citizen is present. Organize, appoint a committee of public safety, and proceed in such force that there can be no resistance. We shall not be a mob, but a united people exercising their residuary rights of self-protection."

Shouts of assent greeted the suggestion. Four men, who seemed naturally to take the lead, drew apart and conferred together; then Lynn Worthington announced:

"The court-house bell will ring at a quarter to eight. Each man must bring his friends. Get to work, every one of you!"

At first Adrien had not observed two young fellows who rode up on horseback and stopped near the edge of the crowd. They sat quite amusedly, contemplating the turmoil. A man ran out, beckoning with his rifle, and calling peremptorily:

"Hey there, Buck Flint! Come here."

The taller of the two horsemen, a slender, dark young man, corrected him.

"Mr. Flint, if you please!"

"That's all right, Mr. Flint; will you please come here?"

"With pleasure, if you request it properly"; and he flicked his splendid horse.

The other rider, a blue-eyed lad, moved forward with his friend.

"Here, fellers! here's Buck Flint an' John Redlaw; le's send our warnin' by them."

Flint sat his horse, smiling quietly at the scores of hostile glances that were shot toward him.

"How can I serve you gentlemen?"

"Mr. Flint"—it was Dr. Bodley who spoke—"we have called a mass-meeting at the court-house to-night. Our people will notify all professional gamblers to leave town. We desire that you communicate this fact to your associates at the Kangaroo."

Flint listened respectfully, and bowed.

"With pleasure, doctor."

Young Redlaw laughed outright, ignoring a hundred armed and wrathful men. Flint touched his elbow and bowed again.

"I apologize, gentlemen, for Mr. Redlaw's mirth. This giving of notice happens so frequently that he feels childish to carry such a message."

"We mean it," warned Dr. Bodley.

"You bet! That's the word with the bark on it."

Flint barely glanced at this new speaker. Without answering, he turned back to Dr. Bodley, who inquired:

"What will *you* do, Mr. Flint?"

There was nothing arrogant in Flint's reply.

"Personally, and speaking for myself alone, I shall remain. As for the others, you have given notice many times—and they are here."

"It means fight."

Flint shrugged his shoulders with a singular mixture of courtesy and tolerant disbelief.

"Mr. Flint"—the doctor's voice throbbed with earnestness—"I trust you will not continue to ally yourself with such men. You are a gen—"

Something in the expression of Buck Flint stopped the physician from volunteering advice or making personal remarks. Flint tightened his rein with the remark:

"While I live in Hades, I suppose I must fight for the devil. Any other messages? I wish you a very good day, gentlemen."

Adrien watched them riding off, and his first frank impulse was one of admiration.

"Pity—pity—pity!" Dr. Bodley murmured, shaking his head.

Again Adrien searched his memory. He did not recall the name of Buck Flint on that list of speculators, and it was difficult to link such a man with such an infamy.

Flint's appearance and manner had sobered the mob. There were no more boisterous threats or loud talking. This would be no playtime job which Dr. Bodley had cut out for them; men looked serious as they separated and set about it.

The street resumed its drowsy quiet, which Maggie Belle had interrupted. Adrien sat wondering what he should do. In a state of public turbulence he could probably do nothing.

"Good-by, Dr. Bodley," he said, extending his hand and bowing with profound respect.

"Good-by, sir; I fear you have arrived just in time to witness a house-cleaning. My regrets, sir!"

Adrien hurried to Lynn Worthington's office. Lynn was seated at his table, writing furiously, and alone; otherwise Adrien would not have entered. It was odd to see Lynn Worthington lift a frowning face and speak abruptly.

"Have a seat, sir; I'll be through in a minute."

Adrien sat in a splint-bottomed hickory chair and watched his friend fold a paper, jam it into a big envelope, and tie the red tape.

"Now then, talk quick. I beg your pardon, sir, but I'm in a hurry."

A puzzled look, which was not quite a recognition, came into Worthington's eyes, and passed. Adrien drew closer and glanced toward the door which opened into Worthington's bedroom.

"Can't we go back yonder?"

Worthington had several such clients, the suspicious kind that do not want to be seen consulting a lawyer.

"All right—hurry up!"

He led his caller into the back room and shut the door. The puzzled look did not lift from his face until Adrien caught his hand.

"Lynn, don't you know me?"

Worthington shook his head.

"No, but I've seen you somewhere."

"Yes, at the university—roommates for three years."

"Vally?" Worthington said incredulously. "What on earth are you doing here, in this get-up?"

Worthington forgot his hurry when Adrien commenced telling him about the Kinlock robbery, and particularly as to the letters expected from Cecile. He told Lynn everything, except about the cipher and the slave insurrection that Old Shack was planning. In Worthington's wrought-up mood Adrien feared to trust him with that.

"Now," he concluded, "I'm going down to the Kangaroo to find my box."

Lynn stood up and faced his friend.

"Look here, Vally, you're a fool to be taking such chances. Better say good-by to what you've lost. We can't do a thing legally with that gang at the Kangaroo. Sometimes I suspect that our officers may be in league with them. Many of our prominent merchants support them; they say that gambling is a good thing for the community, for gamblers spend money freely. If a citizen gets killed in the den, that's his lookout—he had no business being there. Those desperadoes think they own the town. It hasn't been two hours since one of their women insulted Miss Wyndham, and her man abused Dr. Bodley. Imagine any man having the effrontery to abuse Dr. Bodley! But they've overplayed their hand; our people are ready to burn the Kangaroo and hang fifty of them on Lynch's gallows. Some good citizens will get killed; deplorable, of course, but it's got to come. What had you thought of doing?"

"I don't know exactly—just feel my way in."

"Feeling your way in is all right; anybody can feel his way into the Kangaroo. How are you going to feel your way out? Look here, Vally, that's too big a job for one man. Those fellows are organized. Some of them belong to the Shack gang, and—don't shake your head at me; I know you are stubborn as a mule, but you needn't be an idiot."

"Lynn, I wouldn't be doing this without a reason. I realize the danger far more clearly than you do."

"Yes, and that's what entices you—'if a path be dangerous known, the danger's self is lure alone.'"

Adrien smiled.

"Same old Lynn, spouting 'The Lady of the Lake.' Keep the letters for me. I'll come in every few days to get them and let you know what's happening." Adrien started out of the door, and waved his friend not to follow. "We must not go on the street together—remember, you don't know me from a side of sole-leather. I'm Tom Trotter now, and perhaps you might forget it—"

"Forget? Forget those freckles? Forget that hay stuff you're passing off for hair? You look more like Sut Lovingood or Ransy Sniffles. Go 'long, Vally, and luck go with you—but a fool's a fool for a' that, for a' that!"

XVIII

IN the care-free joy of youth Adrien de Valence had strolled these streets before, tipping his hat to dames who waved their fans upon the galleries, pausing to chat with laughing girls who hung about the gates. This afternoon was just as placid, and the air was just as sweet, but no girls hung about the gates. The street groups were all men, and they were not laughing.

Tensity was in the air, and Adrien felt it, for he had his unlearned part to play. Barlow would be expecting him; he must go to the Kangaroo. That was a fixed fact, and dangerous enough when times were normal. To-night, with the courthouse bell ringing on the hill, it would be like blundering naked into a hornets' nest, with somebody outside applying a torch. That was exactly why Adrien felt impelled to go on, to act, and act at once. The Kangaroo might be burned, and all hopes of getting information go up in smoke.

When darkness came, Adrien halted at the south end of a shivering foot-bridge that spanned Glass's Bayou. To his left the mighty river ran; in the angle between the bayou and the Mississippi stood the Kangaroo, like a beast with flaming eyes, crouching against the black hill that loomed behind it. Lights glittered upon the bayou, dancing with delight above the waters that hid many a murdered man.

Adrien was not conscious of hiding out; he was merely taking a last precaution before venturing in. Yet he chose the shadow of a gnarled mulberry to stand and watch the men who passed. Swaggering fellows came by twos and three, never alone, talk-

ing loudly and swinging their canes. Rich planters crossed the bridge, men familiar with the sights of Paris and London, willing to lose a few hundred for the sake of seeing the Kangaroo. Young boys hurried on, heads down, anxious to escape observation, yet feverishly fearful lest they should be too late, and so miss a lucky play.

Four men approached, walking two and two. Adrien stepped deeper into the shadows, for he recognized the stockily built man who had boarded the steamboat at the Château de Clery. The three others were those whom he suspected of traveling with Gid Barlow. They crossed the bridge as men who knew where they were going, and entered the Kangaroo.

Around that front door hovered a crowd of sports and victims, the spiders and the flies, outlined together against the yellow light. Adrien bided his chance until no one went or came, then approached the wavering bridge.

He had taken two or three steps when a figure uprose from the darkness behind him. He felt rather than saw, and turned swiftly. For ten minutes he had watched that empty spot; now a man stood in that space with a hand upon either rail. It startled Adrien into reaching for his weapon.

"Hee, hee!" came the shrill, familiar laugh. "I knows you—you's Adrien Vally; I see you, Marengo."

"Hush, Will, hush!" Adrien glanced around in terror; the lack-wit's laugh went shuddering through him like the tremulous cry of a screech-owl. He was shaking all over, and shaking the bridge. "Hush, Will! Here's a dollar—run up-town and buy some candy."

The light from a window fell across Will's grinning face. He stood like a stork, rubbing one bare foot against a bare shank; stupidly he gazed at Adrien, then turned the dollar over and over in his palm. Once he lifted his face, and some undercurrent of purpose seemed to stir within his shallow mind.

Adrien was badly frightened. His eyes shifted backward to the doors of the Kangaroo, where that group of derelicts had gathered. They were beyond ear-shot if one spoke low, and Adrien was speaking very low; but he stopped suddenly when three men swung into view, coming from the town. By the snatch of a song and their insolent laughter Adrien guessed

their kidney. He caught the idiot's shoulders and whirled him round.

"Run, Will—run up-town and spend your money."

Will did not move; it was Adrien who sped toward the door of the Kangaroo.

"Hee, hee!" the high-pitched cackle followed after him. "I knows *you*, hee, hee!"

Will flapped his arms like a night bird, and went flitting toward the lights of Washington Street.

Will o' the Woods was gone. Adrien checked himself, for fear of what the idlers might think if they had noticed him running; but no one had noticed, and nobody cared. In Kangaroo etiquette a gentleman's eccentricities are his own, and not the subject of personal comment.

Adrien slackened speed, halting before he reached the glare that streamed through the open door. His hands shook, and his heart throbbed like an overstrained engine.

"I won't go in for a while—I'm not myself."

At the door he paused, debating; his pulse slowed and his nerves grew steadier, until a heavy hand fell upon his shoulder.

"Ain't you the feller what calls hisself Tom Trotter?" Wheeling, Adrien faced three men. "That's the young rooster we want; come along!"

Two of them caught his arms. Adrien hung back.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Cap says—"

"Shut up, Higgins," warned another voice. "We ain't got no time to argufy; take him straight to cap."

In that moment of time, Adrien looked about for the nearest loophole. The narrow bridge was blocked by half a dozen men. On one side was the bayou; on the other, those precipitous hills. Behind him lay the broad and yellow river. But he had no choice, even of these.

"Come along, pardner!"

His captors led him through the door and into the brilliantly lighted gambling-hall. Swiftly Adrien searched among the faces of the men within, feverishly intent upon the play. He saw no friend, no one that he recognized, except the gambler, Buck Flint, who lounged beside a faro-table.

There was nothing unusual in the entrance of these four men, nothing to attract more than a nonchalant glance from

Flint. With Gid Barlow it was different. Adrien saw him near the center of the room, watching the door and not the games. Barlow nodded approvingly to the foremost captor.

"That's our man!"

Skinny scuttled out from somewhere, with a broom in his hand and a rag bound around his head. The lad had got his beating. He looked up with big, scared eyes and scuttled back again.

Nobody seemed to notice Adrien. The frenzied gamblers hung upon the turn of the cards and the rolling of fortune's little ball.

"This way, pardner!"

They passed out of the main room, and through another big room, into a tiny, dark pen of a hall, where the dim light struggled down a stairway. At the foot of the stairs two men were talking earnestly. Adrien recognized Dick Hullum and the stockily built fellow from the Château de Clery. Hullum stood aside to let them pass.

"Got him, did you? Good! Go right up—I'll be there in a minute."

There was space for only one at a time to mount that narrow stairway, steep as a ladder, with a smoking candle at the top. The tall man shoved Adrien ahead; the other three came after in single file.

The stairway creaked and cracked. Adrien found himself wondering whether it would complain and groan when they bore him down again. Or would they bring him down? Those southern windows of the Kangaroo opened directly above the bayou; the bayou was deep, it flowed into the river, and Father Mississippi kept all secrets committed to his care.

Adrien walked the steadier, perhaps, for the feel of two good pistols against his sides—excellent weapons which would account for two men, unless they struck him from behind. He expected no immediate blow. Hullum had ordered them up-stairs, and whatever was intended would probably await his arrival.

The cipher in his boot-leg troubled him. Wise old Pibrac had warned against carrying such a telltale. The young Frenchman unconsciously shrugged his shoulders; there was no use wishing he hadn't brought it with him.

A door at the head of the stairs opened into a dingy hallway, planked and unpainted. All the tawdry embellishment had been lavished upon the rooms below. A

candle flickered in its bracket against the wall. De Valence noted the blur of a window at the far end of the hall. What would happen if he dashed to that window and sprang out? There was only one obstacle, a burly fellow standing like a sentinel beside the last door.

"Hurry up, pardner!"

The stalwart body-guard shoved him on. The guard at the door was evidently expecting them. He asked no questions, but knocked, and, in response to an order from within, opened the door. Gid Barlow and Dick Hullum came striding along the hallway, brushed past, and entered.

"Cap, here's our man," Gid announced.

"Fetch him in. We want to get done with this job."

Tite Higgins drew Adrien inside and closed the door. A powerful, gray-bearded man sat at a table in the center, facing the door. This man glanced up; the candle lighted his features—it was the same man who had interfered when young De Valence knocked Wild Bill from the stage-plank of the Southern Belle—Shackleford Orr, the dreaded leader of the land-pirates.

Higgins took the only vacant chair, and left Adrien standing with his back against the door. Old Shack went on writing, and nobody said a word. All day a scorching sun had beat against the weather-boarding outside; the heat within was stifling, but they had the windows closed, the sash down, and curtains drawn.

Finally Old Shack pushed aside his writing and lifted a stubby beard.

"Barlow, is this your feller? Where did you get hold of him?"

"On the steamboat coming up from New Orleans."

The questions were addressed to Barlow, but Shack gazed at the newcomer, searching him through and through. He saw a young man with thick, dead-looking, yellowish hair, freckles, and strong boots—very ill at ease. Old Shack fired the next question directly at him—disconcerting, abrupt:

"What name do you go by?"

Adrien fumbled speechlessly at his cap; he could not remember that fictitious name which lurked somewhere in the dim recesses of his memory.

"Speak out!" Barlow ordered. "He calls himself Tom Trotter."

"That's it, that's it—Tom Trotter." Adrien had made a lame start.

"What is your real name?"

"Tom Beasley, cap." The newcomer straightened up, his wits rushed back, and he stood at guard, with the drawling dialect upon his tongue.

"Where did you come from?"

"Virginny, sir."

"What part of Virginia?"

"Rockbridge County."

"And you can't go back home?"

"Not yit I can't, cap; not fer a little spell, nohow."

"Where were you traveling?"

"I was making it todes Texas."

"Mississippi is a heap safer than Texas." There came a long silence, a silence of boring eyes—then the unexpected shot: "Do you know any folks at Natchez?"

"No, cap, not a human."

"At Rodney?"

"Nary soul."

"Grand Gulf? Mouth o' Red River?"

The new man kept shaking his head.

"Does anybody know you at those places?"

"No."

Old Shack stretched out his hand to Barlow.

"Gid, lemme see that paper again."

Barlow took the handbill from his pocket and Shack read it through.

"Two hundred dollars reward." Trotter, is that why you can't go home?"

Those keen, gray eyes were trained to look straight through a man. Adrien felt that he was not meeting them with equal composure.

"All right, Barlow," Shack decided. "I thought he'd do; but th' ain't nothin' like lookin' a recruit in the face. Take him along, Tite. No, hold up a minute."

Their leader picked up a scrap of paper and commenced writing in cipher, very slowly, one character at a time. Hullum leaned over and touched his arm.

"Cap, do you reckon it's safe to send them things now?"

"No, I forgot," snapped the gray man. "Fine scrape you got us in. Can't write nobody. Have you heard from Natchez?"

Hullum shook his head.

"Look here, Dick, you've got to hear some news, an' hear it mighty quick!" Shack tore up the half-written note. "Come here, Tite. Git outside, Trotter, an' wait in the hall."

As Adrien passed out, Higgins drew his

chair close to Captain Shackleford Orr. Shack spoke deliberately, to impress something upon the other's mind. Adrien listened acutely, for those orders concerned him; but the door closed, and he stood in the hallway with three silent henchmen.

When the door reopened, Tite Higgins's gangling figure swung into the passageway.

"Come along, Trotter," was all he said; and they went.

XIX

On a level ledge, half-way up the hill behind the Kangaroo, a man waited with four horses. Higgins thrust a bridle into Adrien's hand.

"Here's yo' hoss."

In utter silence they led their animals to the summit, where a well-defined road crept like a tight-rope walker along the backbone. Far below, the lights of the Kangaroo glittered upon the bayou, and went dancing across the river.

"Trotter, you stick to me; you other fellers scatter."

The two horsemen disappeared; Adrien followed Tite Higgins down the hill road toward the city, splashing through Glass's Bayou at the ford. Higgins took the first street to the left, and walked his horse until they struck Jackson Road.

"Hurry now," he whispered, urging his animal into a lope.

Eastward they galloped through deep cuts where dirt cliffs walled them in on either side, cantered over the hill crests, and plodded across dark bottoms. Higgins was not talkative. After two hours' riding they came upon both the other men in a skirt of woods.

"Here's the river, Tite."

It was the Big Black, fifteen miles east of Vicksburg. All four of them left the road and picked their way in single file among the ravines, going down, down. Dark water gleamed through an opening between the trees. Higgins dismounted.

"Get off, boys," he said.

Three figures moved from the river's brink and talked with Tite in whispers. When Adrien's eyes grew accustomed to the darkness he could see two skiffs, with five or six people in each; several of these, he thought, were women. A baby wailed; a quick hand muffled it.

"Keep that brat quiet there. You won't never git to a free State ef you make so much fuss!"

Higgins pushed Adrien into the second boat.

"Them is yo' oars." Every man seemed to know what he was about. "Joe, start on ahead," Tite ordered. "You know all these crooks an' turns."

The leading boat shoved off upon a bed of reflected stars; the second boat followed its shimmering trail. Their well-muffled oars made no noise.

"Go easy, boys," Joe cautioned. "A lot o' folks lives hereabouts."

Through that long night the young Frenchman had plenty of time to think. Their oars rose and fell in silence, scarcely splashing against the current that helped to bear them on. If a rowlock creaked, they stopped and wedged it tighter. If a negro shifted in his seat, Higgins warned him sternly.

Before the misty eyelids of morning had opened into day, both skiffs were drawn ashore beneath overhanging willows near the mouth of Big Black. Two miles beyond them rolled the Mississippi.

Joe ordered his negroes from the skiffs and huddled them together on the bank—eleven unquestioning creatures, men, women, and children—who watched with big eyes to see what these white folks were going to do. Joe herded them jealously, and not a word of theirs escaped him.

It slowly dawned upon Adrien that this must be the "Low Joe" mentioned in Hulum's cipher, whose business it was to handle gangs of stolen negroes. One might have guessed his trade by looking at the fellow—squatty, bushy-browed, hairy-faced, whose legs and elbows crooked outward as he walked; a shambling baboon, with more than human cunning.

Adrien kept silent as the negroes, observing two other men whom he could not identify. "Spike" was a sandy-bearded, fish-eyed man of fifty, with a face like a squeezed lemon. "Buddy," younger and round-faced, nervous and new at the game.

After the negroes had been unloaded, Tite Higgins went scouting through the woods, stretching his long neck here and there, cautiously as a mud-turtle. Having satisfied himself, he came back.

"Joe, do you reckon it's safe to light a fire? I want some coffee."

"Th' ain't nobody livin' 'in five miles, but we dassen't make too big a smoke; hunters and fishermen strays along here sometimes."

One of the black women kindled a prudent fire and bent over it with a coffee-pot; another added middlings to their breakfast. Joe sent Spike and Buddy in different directions to keep a lookout. Spike had only been gone a few minutes before he hurried back to camp.

"Say, Tite, thar's a keel-boat down yonder in them bushes. Fur as I kin make out, th' ain't but one man on bode, an' he's drunk."

"I'll go take a squint."

Higgins followed the scrawny Spike into a canebrake. He returned, walking rapidly, and beckoned Joe aside.

"Keep yo' niggers mighty quiet. I need all these fellows—"

Tite spoke on, but in such a low voice that Adrien could not catch it. They were hatching some devilment. Joe's lips shut a little more grimly, and his eyes looked a little colder. He nodded, that was all.

"Come along, Trotter; tread in my footsteps, ef you kin straddle fer enough."

Four men, one behind the other, wormed their way through a tangle of underbrush until they saw a flatboat moored in a sheltered cove. A hawser held the Lula fast to a cottonwood-tree, and a single plank ran from her gunwale to the shore. Tite dodged back into the bushes when a voice shouted from the deck:

"I see you fellers; come along!" An oldish man, with a red, chubby face, braced himself against the corner of his cabin. He wagged his head jovially and winked with bleary eyes. "Come abode, you fellers; I'm lonesome. Don't stan' out thar a peekin' in, like po' boys at a frolic!"

Tite Higgins stepped into the open.

"Hello, cap; all by yo'self?"

"Sure, an' itchin' fer company."

Higgins led his gang across the plank. The red-faced captain shook their hands.

"Mighty glad ter see you—want a drink?"

Tite glanced around him.

"How come you got no helper?"

The captain chuckled wisely, then looked solemn.

"Quare, ain't it?—but the play come up quare. Me an' my pardner tied up fer a little spree. Them two fools got to fightin', an' the helper chunked my pardner over-bode. That's the end o' him—dived under water like a shuffler-duck with his wing broke. Co'se I took a shot or two at the helper, jes' fer greens; he oughter knowed

I never meant no harm by that. Jeeminy cracklins! That feller made a straight coat-tail, tearin' through them bushes same as a wild hog. Monstrous lonesome spree 'thout nobody to drink with you, ain't it, fellers?"

Spike slapped his thin shank and laughed uproariously.

"We're the boys you're lookin' fer when it comes to passin' roun' the speerits. Pardner, what's yo' name?"

"Jes' call me Ed for short, an' leave off the cap'n. Ain't this luck, havin' a bunch o' good company drap in unbeknownst? Come on, my hearties; take a stiff drap from the horn." With legs wide-spraddled, Captain Ed zigzagged toward the cabin. "Jes' sit down anyhowar."

There were three bunks, three chairs, and a rough table; several bales of hides left barely room to turn around in the cabin, and marked the trading character of the boat. A fire smoldered on the hearth of chinked-up bricks; a pot simmered. Captain Ed picked up a gourd, and pronounced the cheerful inquiry:

"Take it hot? All hands round? Here's the fixaments." Meeting unanimous approval, he poured two big gourds of water into the pot, then reached for his whisky-jug. "The main worry 'bout takin' it hot is, you got to wait a spell. Jes' kick that sugar-bucket over this way."

The loquacious Irishman gabbled on, and his steaming brew began to smell mighty tempting. Tite Higgins searched the cabin with roving glance, experienced in putting valuation upon such cargoes. He sauntered forward and looked down the hatchway. The hold was full of barrels and bales.

Adrien felt very grateful to Captain Ed for that hot whisky punch, which he sipped slowly from a cup. Ed mopped his bald head, and his face grew rosier from the warmth within.

"Buss the jug agin, you fellers. One drink ain't no good 'thout another. I been all-fired sober for more'n six months, and got to keep sober from here to Orleans. You bet, when I hit that man's town, I'm due to limber up. Got plenty money to limber with. Dip deep, boys, dip deep!"

Tite refilled his own cup, but he did not drink. The others took their second dram.

"Drink free, my hearties; plenty mo' in the jug, an' plenty barrels in the hold."

"Had a good trade comin' down?" Tite inquired casually.

"Fine; sellin' with both hands, an' buyin' with both hands. My pardner an' me loaded up with bulk pork, clothes, hardware, all kinds o' jimcrackery. Got half of it left, an' a barge-load o' hides—to say nothin' o' the money. All that's mine now, sence my pardner's gone"—Ed winked cunningly—"an' I'm goin' to make Orleans hum. Take another suck outen that yearthenware."

Having emptied his cup over the side of the boat, Tite Higgins dipped for the third time. Captain Ed gave him a rousing slap on the back.

"Strong as a Dick hoss, ain't it, pardner? Here, you fellers, buss the jug agin!"

Higgins glanced warningly at his men as they each took another cup and drank sparingly. Adrien wondered what they meant to do. He was taking a desperate risk in mingling with these men, and he couldn't endure their drunken mouthings. He strolled out of the cabin and sat upon a gunwale. The smell of green hides, staked out to dry, was less offensive than the stuffy fumes of whisky and the horseplay of carousing ruffians.

The sun had not yet risen, and all the world was still. His eyes turned southward in the track of his desires.

"This is Wednesday. Cecile reached Port Gibson yesterday."

Port Gibson lay beyond that mist-crowned ridge, and his thoughts went seeking until they found her. A good horse would take him to her side in two hours, or three. He tried to imagine the house where she was visiting; what the Buckinghams looked like; what they were saying; all the bustle and merriment of the marriage. Perhaps Cecile would talk about her own wedding, with flushed cheeks and sparkling eyes.

That vacuous laughter from the cabin irritated him no longer. He heard no noises of any kind, nothing to attract attention—did not see Tite Higgins when he came out on deck and cut a twenty-foot length of small rope. Then loud voices rose, one above the other, each clamoring to be heard, and died away into a sudden silence. A clank of iron caught Adrien's ear, as if some one were shaking a chain; then silence again—a long interval of uncanny silence.

He heard the shuffle of feet, so measured, so regular and slow, that he glanced toward the cabin. Spike and Buddy were

backing out of the door. Tite Higgins followed them, stooping and facing Adrien. All three men bent over; they were carrying something large and heavy—something that sagged in the middle and dragged along the deck.

At first Adrien supposed it to be a roll of green hides that they were moving out of the cabin because of the stench. None of the men spoke, none of them laughed. Buddy glanced round to see which way he was going; his face was pallid, very serious, far from drunk.

Adrien looked closer, and saw the top of a bald head; they were dragging out the old Irishman. Drunk? No—Captain Ed's forehead dripped redly, and his arms swung limp. Two andirons rattled along the planks, tied with a rope about his neck; two more were attached to his feet.

Adrien tried to call out; the words choked in his throat. He started to rise, but could only sit and stare.

They dumped the body on deck beside the gunwale. Higgins stooped and deliberately cut off the andirons from its feet.

"One pair's a plenty to weight 'im down. 'Tain't no sense throwin' good money into the river. Now, men, swing all together! One—two—three—leggo!"

Three pairs of stout arms flung the dead man far into the current, his arms and legs flapping, the andirons rattling at his neck. A splash—the water trembled, bubbled up, then ran in shuddering ripples among the willows. The ripples died away.

Buddy wiped his face on a checkered handkerchief; his hand shook violently. He ran back to the cabin and gulped a cup of raw whisky.

Adrien sat motionless. From boyhood he had listened to tales of war and glory, and death—of men killed in lawful fight, of shambles on the Nivelles road, of soldiers stark and stiff along the retreat from Moscow, of frozen corpses at the passage of the Beresina. Himself had seen lives snuffed out in sudden brawl, and battles hand-to-hand; he had witnessed the execution of deserters and marauders, stood with their faces against the wall and coolly shot to death. That was all in the day's work, an ugly part of his trade.

Dumb with horror, he sat upon that gunwale and watched those human beasts as they calmly turned and began a systematic search of the cabin. This, for the first time, brought him face to face with a sick-

ening realization of all that was written in the cipher.

XX

SLOWLY the blood throbbled back to Adrien's heart, color flooded into his cheeks, and he began to think. He must sit there alone until he regained command of himself.

Tite Higgins strode out of the cabin.

"Pardner, you done it fine; nobody couldn't ha' slugged him no quicker'n you."

Adrien started up from the gunwale, his face utterly blank. Tite came on with outstretched hand.

"Shake, pardner! The way you belted that old feller from behind—that's what I call amazin' neat. It'll give you a mighty proud name with the cap."

"What do you mean?" Adrien's face went white again.

"You jes' up an' fixed 'im, whilst we was haggling over it."

"So you men are going to tell that I murdered Captain Ed?" The glitter in the Frenchman's eyes should have warned Tite Higgins.

"That's it, pardner—precise."

"You are a liar, you—"

With a yell Tite Higgins sprang backward, away from the black-ringed mouths of two pistols.

"Hole up, Trotter, hole up—don't shoot!"

It was no use to run; Tite stood stock-still. His grin turned sickly and quivered among the freckles at his lips. The young Frenchman felt his muscles stiffen into steel; he could shoot this man without a tremor of repugnance.

Spike came rushing from the cabin.

"What's the matter? What's—"

Spike halted; one of those pistols seemed to rise of its own volition and cover him. Buddy Jimmerson stuck out his head, and ducked back behind the cabin door, reappearing with the shotgun which hung over Captain Ed's bunk. Higgins caught his breath and tried to laugh.

"Never mind, Buddy—'tain't nothin' but our reg'lar joke. This here new feller ain't got the hang of it. Trotter, ease down them pistols! They gives me sort o' chicken-fits."

"Joke!" Adrien repeated. "What do you mean by a joke?"

"Well, you see, pardner, it's jes' this

way." Tite grinned like a baked possum. "Whenever we got a greeny along with us, an' sumpin' like this turns up, we-all 'grees to lay it onter him."

"What for?"

"To get 'im in deep; then he'll trot along kinder peaceable. Some greenies takes it wusser'n collery-morbus. Fer's I'm concerned, I admires yo' spunk, 'cept it's sorter aggravokin' to have them weepins p'inted at a feller's gizzard. Say, pardner, won't you kinder ease 'em down a leetle bit now?"

Adrien hesitated; this might be a ruse to disarm him and send him to join Captain Ed. Spike and Buddy looked at Tite Higgins, and then broke into such boisterous and unaffected hilarity that Adrien felt assured. Higgins didn't laugh—not until both those pistols dropped.

"Look here, pardner," he remarked, "ef you shoots steady as you p'int's, 'twouldn't be no gittin' away. 'Twas kinder sudden, warn't it, this cashin' in o' Cap'n Ed? In this here game 'tain't no tellin' who the stack o' chips is goin' to belong to next minute. Set down, an' le's have a confab. Run along, you fellers, an' see what you kin find."

Higgins sat with Adrien on the gunwale and gave the simple details.

"'Twarn't no sense holdin' a long pow-wow. Ed was drunk, an' no use to nobody. This boat an' cargo is wuth ten thousand dollars. Them sharps in Orleans would git it, ef we didn't. Ed kept braggin' he had nobody watchin' out for him. Old codger had no business temptin' Providence too fer. Come on, now; we got to work, an' work quick."

"What do you want me to do?"

Adrien rose stiffly, and his voice sounded queer. Higgins caught him by the arm with a rough kindness, and started toward the cabin.

"You's jes' pale as a sheet. Fust thing you got to do is swig a big dram. I reckon you ain't got broke in yit. Never mind, son; after you trots a while with us speculators you'll like it. Everything comes jes' as nacheral."

There was no unusual disorder in the cabin. The speculators were not plundering like hurried thieves, but like business men taking inventory of newly acquired property. Higgins dipped a cup full of punch.

"Here, Trotter, drink this."

Adrien lifted the cup to his lips, and put it away with a shudder. Captain Ed had brewed that punch; it was still warm, and his body was still warm at the bottom of the river.

Higgins chuckled.

"Stummick kinder squeamish? Heap o' young fellers is like that when they fust starts in; but we got to work here." Tite snatched up a quilt and pillow. "Go out yonder and lie down under them trees. You's plumb wore out. Git a little nap."

Adrien took the quilt and pillow, staggered along the plank, and lay down beneath a young magnolia-tree. Pure white blossoms nodded above his head, beams of sunlight flickered in; but sleep was not for him. He lay there watching the outlaws as they moved about on deck, heard the clatter of lumber and the dragging of canvas. A saw began to rasp; every stroke of a hammer went thumping through his head. The men were extending the cabin, partially with boards and partially with a canvas-covered framework.

Presently Tite Higgins leaned over the gunwale, calling:

"Trotter, Trotter, come here!"

Adrien rose unsteadily and stumbled to the end of the narrow plank. Higgins waved him back.

"Hole up, pardner, you mought tumble in." Tite ran out and led him safely to the barge. "You muster cotch a chill last night; these here swamps is tarnal bad fer chills." Tite had ransacked the cabin and found a box of papers. Some were scattered on the floor; one he held in his hand. "I ain't no overly good clerk. We keeps everything what calls for money, and burns up the rest. Some of our boys is 'mazin' smart 'bout collecting cash on these here papers. I never could honey-coax no money outer papers—got to git mine by main strength an' awk'ardness." Tite looked helplessly at his new recruit. "I 'lowed from them tender hands o' yours that you mought be a heap mo' artful at clerkin' than you is at handlin' of a flat-boat. We gits a plenty o' them kind now-adays. 'Tain't no disgrace, boy—some of 'em turns out to be tip-top speculators. You jes' take that box ashore and spell over them papers. O' co'se, we don't want to leave nothin' on the boat what'll give nobody a chance to find whar she comes from. Hole up, I'll tote it; you walks mighty wabbly."

Tite balanced himself along the plank and deposited the box under a tree. Before returning to the Lula, he paused to consider her name, roughly painted across the bow. He rubbed his chin and shook his head.

"Got to git shet o' that."

Most of the papers were worthless, except for identification, giving the names of many persons along the river with whom the dead man had been trading. In one packet were several drafts upon New Orleans banks, all payable to Ed Rial in return for merchandise. Adrien's first thought was to let these drafts be presented, with indorsements which would necessarily be forged, and by this means capture the gang-leaders. But this would result in premature disclosure; so he slipped the drafts into his boot-leg, to be sent to Pibrac together with a detailed account of the affair.

Much of his horror and repugnance had passed away, leaving Adrien with a bulldog tenacity to set his teeth and keep his hold. He was undoubtedly getting a hold—a hold upon tangible facts—eleven negroes and a barge.

"Hello, Trotter; find anything?" Higgins spoke cheerily; the sun shone through the forest.

"Nothin' 'ceptin' a lot o' trash—chips an' whetstones an' sech like. Here's two money-papers; belikes you mought collect on 'em."

"How much?"

"This'n's for fifty dollars an' that'n's for thirty-five."

"Skacely wuth foolin' with," Tite remarked loftily; but he put the drafts in his pocket, nevertheless. "Trotter, we made a fine drag. That old codger had nigh onter two thousand dollars in gold money, to say nothin' o' more'n five hundred in shinplasters, an' a stack o' Mexicans. Us boys is holdin' out a hundred apiece before the general divide. That's lagniappe. Here's yourn."

Adrien recoiled from his first touch of blood gold.

"Needn't be skeered to take it," Tite urged. "That's all right with the cap. This is extry money; cap is plumb lib'ral when his men makes a pick-up. After we sells this boat-load o' whisky and hides, we'll be tol'able well fixed. I'd love to hit Orleans, an' have a splurge with the gals at old Mother Surgick's. Come along,

let's tote the news to Joe—he ain't heerd nothin'."

Higgins cast aside all caution; he strode through the woods, whistling and slashing about with a stick. Adrien followed, that weight of gold hanging like a dead pendulum in his pocket, a constant reminder of what Tite Higgins had already forgotten.

Low Joe waited expectantly among his huddle of negroes. The blacks had eaten their breakfast and were standing in stolid silence. Tite called Joe aside; half a dozen words were sufficient to a speculator of Joe's intuitive perceptions. His fish-eyes glittered.

"How much is she wuth?"

"Ten or twelve thousan', I reckon."

"Anything extry? Whar's mine?"

Tite handed over the shining money, which put a newer shine in Low Joe's eyes. Joe beckoned to a round-faced black woman, who brought Adrien some coffee, with a chunk of middlings and bread. He sat on a log to eat; Joe and Tite squatted together on the ground, whispering. Spike and Buddy straggled in separately for their breakfast, talked little, and hurried back to the barge.

All that day Low Joe herded his gang, like a shaggy dog guarding the flock. All that day the hammering and sawing went on aboard the Lula, changing her outward appearance, and making a hiding-place for their human freight. At Tite's suggestion, Adrien hung around the camp to rest.

About noon, Tite broke through the bushes.

"Come here, Trotter," he said, and led Adrien to the barge. "Lula is plenty good enough name for any kind o' craft; but when a boat takes a new boss, she's like a woman—ought to hitch up with a new name. It's a heap more convenient. We found a bucket o' that same kind of paint, an' wants you to rig up a new christenin'."

"What do you aim to christen her?"

"Any kind o' name, male or female, pervidin' it paints over them letters what's already there, an' don't show through. One time I done a job like that, but it war so rough anybody could tell it, plumb across the river."

Higgins fetched a brush and a bucket of paint, sending Buddy for a skiff in which Adrien could stand alongside and work.

"Buddy, you quit pesterin' 'im—Trotter's got to do a heap o' thinkin'."

Adrien sat on the river-bank and studied the crude lettering. He must devise a combination that could be painted over it. With pencil and paper he figured it out. Two strokes changed the first "L" into an "E." The "U" he left unaltered, and converted the second "L" into a "B." After the "A" he painted the letters "N" "K" "S"—forming the name "EUBANKS," with the initials "W. B."

W. B. EUBANKS
of
New Madrid, Mo.

This metamorphosis tickled Tite Higgins immensely.

"I call that real downright smart! You're slick as goose-grease. 'W. B. Eubanks, of New Madrid, Missouri.' That don't sound none like her maiden name—no, sirree, none whatever. Spike, I reckon you got to be Mr. Eubanks fer this trip."

Night falls early and thick in those sheltered swamps. With the last waning light, Low Joe marched his negroes aboard, pulled his skiffs on deck, and all hands maneuvered the barge into the current. Between two lines of dipping willows they passed, then swung round into the open Mississippi.

"No lights, boys," Low Joe ordered, as he placed his stoutest negro men at the sweeps. "Here, Trotter, you set in the bow, an' keep yo' eye skinned for steamboats when we swings round them bends."

At the first far light of a steamboat their skiff would be lowered, with four men at the oars, pulling for the nearest bank, with a long line. They made the line fast to a tree, and the current swept their barge inshore, among the shadows. It was very simple and very safe. They saw everybody, and nobody saw them.

Twice that night the barge ducked in, and lay hid until a steamboat passed. Once they were hailed. Tite answered:

"Barge W. B. Eubanks, New Madrid, Missouri, bound for Orleans"—which was the end of the inquiry.

They did not run past the larger towns in daylight—too much risk of somebody who might be watching out for Captain Rial and the barge Lula. The W. B. Eubanks tied up in the willows above Grand Gulf and Rodney, likewise St. Joe and Natchez—slipping past in the darkness on the far side of the river.

"It's a sight easier to steer clear o'

trouble than to paddle out atter you once gits in!"

This remark being well received, a garrulous change came over the spirit of Titus Higgins's dream. He took the bridle off his tongue, lubricated, and let it roam loose in a free pasture.

Tite's inspiration came from the new fellow, Tom Trotter, who sat on a candle-box, drinking in every word. The goose-necked outlaw reclined luxuriously beneath an awning, and dilated upon his various speculations. Once he mentioned Natchez. Adrien tried not to edge closer, or appear to listen more intently. It was only a word, a connecting link in passing from one exploit to another in the life and adventures of Titus Higgins, Esq.

While Adrien dared not ask questions, especially about Natchez, his manifest excitement encouraged Higgins mightily.

"Loves to hear about it, don't ye? All youngsters is that way when they fust jines the speculators. 'Cose, ef you sets still an' pays 'tention to me, you kin larn a heap. 'Tain't no end to it, son; I could spout from here to Orleans, an' never git started."

Tite's tongue was rattling like a bell-clapper when Low Joe shambled back.

"Tite, I reckon we better warp in an' tie up. Yon's the mouth o' Red River, an' thar's a mighty strong current."

Higgins got up, reluctant to leave such a hungry audience.

"All right, Joe. I'll git her tied up, an' you keep them niggers hid. Blackbird freight draws a monstrous swarm o' flies."

When Tite talked, he talked; when he worked, he worked. Without an extra word he maneuvered their awkward craft into the river's mouth, and made fast in the shade of a cottonwood. This accomplished, he rambled back to Adrien.

"Trotter, we done agreed on one thing—you's the feller to go an' catch old Welter. 'Tain't nobody in this neck o' the woods seed you afore; 'sides that, you got a mighty slick tongue—sometimes you talks like you's 'most eddicated."

This startled Adrien; his tongue might slip once too often and betray him.

"Who's the old codger you's talkin' 'bout?"

"Long-faced whelp that's goin' to buy this barge an' niggers—keen as a brier, an' crooked as a dog's hind leg. Wouldn't never 'spicion him o' bein' a speculator!"

"How'll I find 'im?"

"Can't miss him—got a long black coat what comes down to his knees, an' long black hair what he's all the time combin' with his long fingers. Everything's long about old Welter. Take a squint at his long nose an' say, 'Foller me, Welter;' an' ef he don't foller like a fice pup, jes' give him the sign." Tite made a queer gesture by flirting out his fingers. Adrien looked blank; Tite stopped himself with a jerk. "Wait here till I see Joe."

Tite hurried off to where Low Joe was making fast the stern-line. Adrien saw them talking very earnestly. They were talking about him, and Adrien knew it. At first Joe shook his head, then seemed to agree—but as if he were putting the responsibility on Higgins. Tite returned thoughtfully, and began:

"You onderstan', Trotter, we got a few signs what we uses in our business, so we kin know each other. Can't affode to make no mistakes with strangers. Nobody 'cep' cap'n is got a right to give them signs to a new man; but, bein' as he forgot, an' sont you along with us, this is what we calls a 'mergency case. Joe an' me is goin' to take the 'sponsibility of larnin' you the fust sign. Do jes' like this."

It was very simple, made with two fingers, and would pass unnoticed; yet so distinct as not to be accidental.

"Now try it yo'self, two or three times—that's 'bout right. Everything is got to be straight as a string with Welter, or he won't bite. Sliest old mule you ever seed 'bout puttin' that precious foot o' his'n in a hole! Give him this, and he'll answer like this; then he'll talk a mighty little bit, and try to make you talk a whole gobful. Don't you do much talkin' neither; jes' tell him we got eleven niggers an' a barge at the mouth o' this bayou. Welter's nose will lead him to it."

"Where will I find 'im?"

"Make a bee-line for the nighest church, an' notice whar the grass is wore out the morest. That's the path to Welter's—more'n likely you'll find a good house. Welter is piled up a fortune out o' this business; rich as mud, an' stands high."

With long, easy strokes, Adrien drew away from the barge. Rounding a bend, he shoved his skiff into a clump of willows and stepped ashore. It was his first chance to be alone; a man needed to think when he had a gang of murderers on one hand, and Judge Lynch on the other.

Out of his boot-leg he took the disconnected memoranda of names, dates, places, descriptions of men and negroes, and the papers of Captain Ed. These he hurriedly amplified, so that Pibrac would understand, and tied into a package. The opportunity to get rid of them could not come too soon; he would not live ten minutes should they be discovered.

His fingers tingled as he tied up the package, leaving it unaddressed. How would he send it? Many country postmasters belonged to Old Shack's gang, and pried into the mail.

"Well," he smiled, "if they catch me with a letter to Pibrac, I shouldn't be worse off than with what's already in my boot-leg!"

Two miles below the mouth of Red River an unpainted shanty-boat lay moored underneath the high bank. A pair of chimneys uprose in the clearing beyond. This the shanty-boatman pointed out as the house of Simon Welter.

As Adrien opened Welter's front gate, three men came down the steps and went toward their horses at the hitching-rack. Cautious old Simon made a point of meeting all strangers before anybody else spoke to them. There was no mistaking the long black hair, dangling coat-tails, and pasty face that advanced to greet the stranger.

"Good mornin', brother."

"'Mornin'. Does Mr. Crenshaw live anywhere hereabouts?"

"Crenshaw?"

One of the preachers turned from the hitching-rack—Parson Carmeter, whom Adrien had frequently seen at Natchez.

"Brother Crenshaw resides at Bayou Sara, below here."

"Ain't this Bayou Sara?" Adrien assumed a puzzled expression. "I must ha' come ashore at the wrong landin'."

"Brother, what might be yo' name?" Welter inquired.

"I goes by the name o' Chance, mister—Hiram Chance." Adrien gave the speculator's sign, which Welter returned.

"Brother Chance, let me make you acquainted with Parson Carmeter an' Elder Teapark."

Adrien was thinking in flashes. He realized the wisdom of Pibrac. It would take sledge-hammer evidence to convince these militant parsons that Brother Welter was also a brother to the gang that had murdered Captain Ed.

Welter combed his long black hair with snaky fingers.

"Brother Chance, you must be thirsty. Won't you step in my house an' rest yo' hat?"

Welter led his guest into a broad hallway, and took a pitcher of water from the uncleared breakfast-table. Two daughters giggled through a half-shut door, their faces shiny with Sabbath soaping. Welter made a frowning gesture, and the door slammed.

"What do you want?" he whispered.

"'Leven niggers an' a fine barge at the mouth o' Red River. Low Joe—"

"Sh! I'll come to-night; have the bills o' sale ready. Now git away from here, like a bug dodgin' under a chip!"

When the pair marched solemnly down the steps, Welter was apparently urging the stranger to attend camp-meeting and hear Parson Carmeter preach. Brother Hiram Chance was apparently expressing his intense regret.

Welter bade him good-by and unhitched his horse, riding away with the preachers, and smiling the Sabbath smile of a saint who carries rocks in his pockets to keep from being wafted straight to heaven.

XXI

DAY spun out interminably on the W. B. Eubanks. Tom Trotter kept himself out of the way, while Tite Higgins and Low Joe bent their heads together over an upturned box, on which lay a blank sheet of paper. Sometimes they argued and sweated—sometimes they merely sweated. The paper remained persistently blank—the bill of sale persistently unwritten.

Joe had come of prayerful parentage.

"You got to begin that billy sale right. Start it 'In the name o' God, amen.'"

"'Tain't no sech thing; you got to say somethin' 'bout 'presence.'" Tite slapped at the mosquitoes with a red bandanna, and smoked like a tar-kiln.

"'In the name o' God, amen,'" Joe insisted. "'Jes' set that down to begin with.'"

"That's fer a testimony, whar a feller's fixin' to die."

"Well, when a feller cashes in, don't he give up all the chips what he's got? Ain't we a givin' up them niggers?"

Tite jabbed his pen deep into the ink-horn; great beads of sweat stood out on his hairy arm.

"How do you spell that?"

"Do the spellin' yo'self; ain't you doin' the writin'?"

Tite dropped the pen and mashed a mosquito on his jaw.

"Durned ef I'm goin' to work myself to death. Whar's Trotter?"

Low Joe nudged him.

"Let Trotter be. He's a new feller, an' ain't got no business knowin' how much we gits fer this barge and niggers."

"We don't git nothin' fer 'em unless we has them billy sales done ag'inst the time old Welter comes. You know *he* ain't goin' to write nary line. Trotter! Oh, Trotter! Come here."

Adrien walked down the long, hot deck and stooped into the cabin.

"Trotter, you got to do this here clerk-in'. I reckon you's about the only feller on this boat what kin write a billy sale. Me an' Joe will set on each side an' fight skeeters."

Adrien took up the pen and asked:

"Who's sellin' these here niggers?"

"Make 'em out fer a different name, every one of 'em—fust name pops in yo' head. Old Welter won't take 'em no ways else."

Adrien began:

"'Know all men by these presents—'"

Tite Higgins let out a puff of smoke.

"Tole you so; I 'lowed you had to slap in somethin' 'bout presents, or 'twouldn't be no good."

"Shet up, Tite; you're pesterin' Trotter."

"'Know all men by these presents, that I, Josiah Littlepage, for and in consideration of '—how much for the first one?'"

"Is you got to set that down?" Joe and Tite looked helplessly at each other.

"Reckon so; you gotter put in how much."

"Jig's up, then; we can't write 'em; we don't know nothin' 'bout how much money them niggers is goin' to fetch until Welter looks at 'em. An' 'twon't be much, ef he takes a notion we got to skin out o' here in a hurry."

"Can't you write it 'thout that?" Anxiety bristled in every hair of Joe's beard.

"Yep; we kin leave that part blank."

"Leave it *blank*?" said Joe. "Not git *nothin'* fer 'em? That'll jes' suit old Welter."

Tite nodded.

"Go ahead, Trotter, I onderstan'—jes' the same as leavin' a gap in the fence, an'

puttin' up the rails afterward, when me an' Welter agrees."

Joe snorted.

"*You* an' Welter? Welter'll do all the agreein' by hisself; but go 'long, Trotter, you knows yo' business."

"For and in consideration of — paid me by— Is Welter buyin' in *his* name?"

"Yep, he says it looks a heap more straighter."

Adrien went on:

"Paid me by Simon Welter, have this day bargained and sold unto the said Simon Welter the following negroes, to wit—"

That was Joe's time to speak up and describe the negroes.

"Wesley Henderson, he's the fust one— sound black man, twenty-two years old. Wes ought to be wuth fifteen hundred of anybody's money. I bet old Welter won't 'low us no more'n five hundred fer him. Don't forgit the warrantee part. Welter'll have a fit ef you leave that out."

Adrien continued to write, choosing his words, while Tite and Joe disputed without choosing theirs.

"Joe, we got to watch ole Simon mighty close—he'll skin a flea fer his hide an' taller."

Low Joe flinched at certain unpleasant recollections.

"Yep; he done skunt me so reg'lar that th' ain't no mo' hide left!"

Adrien finished the document, then read it aloud. Higgins leaned against the box.

"Now, Trotter, sign it with a heap o' flourishes an' curleymecues."

"*Me* sign it?"

"Tain't nobody else kin do so."

Adrien didn't know the name of the crime he was committing, but he signed "Josiah Littlepage" at the bottom. Tite refilled his pipe and swelled out proudly.

"Now that's what I call a jam-up good clerk job!"

The other bills of sale were copied from the first, Low Joe supplying name and description of each negro.

"Now, then, we're cocked and primed fer tradin'. All we got to do is to wait."

Tite untangled his long legs and made ready for another long bout of adventure-telling.

"I 'members when old Welter got his fust start, 'way up in Tennessee, preachin' at the biggest kind o' camp-meetin'. His eye had a sorter sky-rakin' look, like he

war fixin' to open the winder o' heaven an' shoo them brothers in. At the same time his pardner was savin' a lot o' good hosses—one o' which was Simon's. O' co'se, the good sisters tuk up a collection to buy the preacher another fine hoss; Welter collared three likely niggers, unhitched his head-line, an' lit out that night. Made sech a good drag that he tuk to preachin' reg'lar in Arkinsaw. Preachin' ain't no bad trade, ef you has a leetle jedgment 'bout hosses. Welter sent all his stock down to Natchitoches, then come to these parts hisse'f an' bought some land. He's been sportin' them long coat-tails ever sence."

Through the fading sunlight of the afternoon Tite rambled on, and Adrien listened. If he were doing nothing better, he was making a firm friend of Tite Higgins. When a steamboat passed or a skiff shot out suddenly from the willows, Adrien felt a choking in his throat. It meant death to be captured in such company. Cases of this kind never went to court; a rope and a tree settled it.

Night came on. Low Joe began to shamble about the deck like a restless bear.

"Maybe old Welter ain't comin'. I allers feels skittish until I gits a bunch o' blackbirds off my hands."

"Dry up that growlin'! Old Simon is itchin' to git his claws on them niggers—a heap more'n what we is to git rid of 'em." In which Tite was eminently correct.

Welter's first remark as he came aboard the barge never deceived Tite Higgins.

"Brother Higgins, I come because I promised; but times is so squally in these parts I ain't goin' to buy no more niggers for a while."

"All right, parson; that talk of yourn knocks off the fust hundred dollars. Le's git down to the draw."

Old Simon was a long-winded haggler. Tite and Joe were no slouches, but Welter knew big figures, and they didn't. He inspected every piece of property on board and estimated its value. At the end he ran over the totals in his mind.

"That all comes to nine thousand four hundred and seventy-five dollars."

Adrien promptly corrected him.

"It 'mounts to ten thousand four hundred and seventy-five dollars, 'cordin' to yo' figgers."

Welter shook his head mightily, but Adrien stuck to his figures, and proved

them item by item. Tite Higgins whispered to Joe:

"We don't git a feller like Trotter more'n once in a coon's age. He's wuth a thousan' dollars every five minutes!"

Trotter nailed old Welter down to his estimate until the skinflint shelled out the money—two thousand in cash, with a draft on New Orleans, payable January 1, 1836, for eight thousand four hundred and seventy-five dollars. It never occurred to Adrien that such a transaction could be consummated otherwise than by ready cash; but this was the speculators' usual course of trade, as Tite Higgins afterward explained.

"We had to 'low Welter some chance to sell an' git the cash to Orleans. That money paper is jest as good as gold-dust. Ef he didn't pay thar wouldn't be no safe place fer Simon in Ameriky, nor yit in Texas!"

Welter bought them out, lock, stock, and barrel, and then began to inquire about their plans.

"Look here, boys, you-all is got to git away quiet an' honest. Folks hereabouts is askin' a heap o' questions about where I gets so many niggers an' flatboats. We got to lie low until things settle down. I done give you fellers a *mighty* good lift—"

"You ain't give *us* no more lift than what we give *you*," Tite answered back. "The stuff on this boat is wuth twenty thousand dollars, an' you know it. You'll make more outen this drag than all us fellers put together."

"I won't make nary cent ef you stirs up trouble. Ef these niggers come from Virginny, like you say, an' this boat comes from Pennsylvania, I'll have plenty time to divide out the stuff an' sell it."

There was no moon; the river nursed a glow of light along the tortuous middle of its course. Welter stepped to the edge of the flatboat and whistled. On the farther side, from its hiding-place among the willows, a large skiff stuck out its nose, cautiously at first, like an enormous alligator, then pulled sturdily toward them with six men at the oars.

These men knew exactly what they had come for; it was not to talk. Almost without a syllable, the negroes were brought up from below and stowed away in the skiff. The head striker spoke a few words to Welter. Welter nodded, and the man shoved off, heading his skiff up-stream.

Three pairs of oars rose and fell in rhythmic sweep, like a night-bird flapping noiselessly along the face of the waters.

Only the eddying trail remained. No sound came back; the river rested as silent as before, the woods as dark. All things were as if that skiff and crew and negroes had never been.

"They'll git to Natchitoches in no time," suggested Higgins. "Then I reckon they'll push on to Sabine River."

Adrien forgot himself, and questioned Welter.

"Whereabouts are you aimin' to sell them niggers?"

Nobody answered. Tite said slowly:

"Atter we turns niggers loose 'tain't no business of our'n whar they goes. You bet he'll send 'em plenty far."

"Got to send 'em far!" snapped Welter. "Ain't they advertisin' right now in the Orleans papers for that last lot you fetched?" Old Simon began to talk sharp and look uneasy. "You fellers cross that river in a hurry, and scatter. Go to old man Corkle's an' buy yo' hosses, same as other flatboatmen does when they goes home. I said *buy* 'em. Folks is gittin' tired o' stealin'."

Higgins had a queer twitching at his lips.

"*Buy* a hoss? That's ag'in' natur, an' can't be did."

XXII

INSTEAD of steering for the landing-place on the Mississippi side, Higgins held his skiff toward a point of woods that projected across a bare space to the water's edge, like a cowlick hanging down a forehead. Buddy Jimmerson got impatient.

"You ain't goin' to hit the road?"

"Naw, I allers loves to hit the woods fust an' take a squint at the big road befo' I sets my foot on it."

Buddy was brash enough to stick up for his own ideas.

"See here, Tite, I don't aim to do much walkin'. That Kangaroo ball comes on Thursday night, an' I ain't goin' to miss it."

Higgins puckered his lips into a grin.

"Youngster, did you ever see *me* do any walkin'? An' I ain't figgerin' on missin' that ball, neither. It's better nor a hundred miles to Vicksburg. 'Co'se, it'll be further ef we wants to scout aroun' an' pick up things; or it mought be a heap nigher

ef somebody jumps up behind an' makes us hurry."

Tite stopped short, and considered that he carried two thousand dollars in his clothes. He had known cheaper men to be murdered.

"Reckon we better go kinder slow," he decided aloud.

"Go slow!" echoed Buddy. "I wants to hit a bee-line for Vicksburg, an' travel fast."

"Shet up, Buddy! You got nothin' but calf-brains, with gals on 'em."

Five men stepped ashore on the sandbar, each with a rifle, saddle, and provisions strapped to his back. They dragged their skiff into the shadows and moored it, for Welter's negro to fetch in the morning; but Tite had a more prudent reason—he hated to do business afoot and get caught on the wrong side of the river without a skiff.

They filed through the woods for a scrambling mile or so, then paused at the edge of a narrow slit in the forest. Fresh-cut stumps marked it as a road, but there were no tracks of wheels and few of horses.

"Huh!" Spike grunted. "'Twarn't no sense bein' skeered o' *this* road. We ain't done nothin', nohow."

"Can't never tell what we *mought* do"; and Tite took the lead again.

Buddy Jimmerson trudged behind and kept talking to Adrien.

"Ef we git them hosses purty sudden we oughter pass Woodville befo' mornin', an' lie in the brush all day. Tuesday mornin' we'll be somewhar nigh Natchez, and Wednesday nigh Fayette. Then comes Port Gibson. I calkerlate we ought to be dustin' into Vicksburg about Thursday night."

Port Gibson? Adrien heard nothing else; Cecile was at Port Gibson. He lagged back to encourage Buddy. "What towns do we pass through?"

"Ain't goin' to pass through nary town, not ef Tite Higgins kin help hisself. He allers skips towns when *he's* scoutin'!"

Being afraid to ask too many questions of one man, Adrien moved forward and walked beside their leader, who was beginning to travel more cautiously.

"Keep yo' eye skinned for a light—old Corkle must live some'eres hereabouts."

"Hurry 'long," called Buddy from the rear. "We'll roust 'im up an' buy them hosses."

Tite barely turned his head.

"We'll *git* them hosses, all right; but 'tain't Christianlike to wake up any ole rooster so long befo' daylight."

Corkle's house lay to the left of the road—a squatty black square in a gray clearing, with a blacker midnight of the woods around it. The corn-crib had a roof of new clapboards, and stood out plainly. Higgins stopped. Spike was whispering to him, pointing out the pasture-lot and fences.

"All right, Spike; you take Buddy an' scout 'round yonder way. Trotter, you come with me. Joe, gimme yo' pack, an' fix yo'self for runnin'. Sneak along the edge o' that fence—all of us meet in the road t'other side of the house."

Four shadows left the road, slinking through the woods with eyes and ears wide open, reconnoitering Corkle's house from every side. Another and more active shadow dodged from tree to tree along the road, sank down silently in the fence corners, and peered at a drove of horses in the pasture-lot. Beyond old Corkle's house those detached shadows coalesced again into a group, their whisperings no louder than the rustle of leaves above their heads.

"Take a bridle apiece; leave yo' saddles here with Joe. Each man fetch his own hoss, and I'll fetch two—one for Joe. Ef they wakes up an' gets too hot behind us, every feller leg it fer hisself to the skiff."

All this was the A B C of their calling, and they understood.

In perfect good order and silence these experienced speculators led the best horses out of Corkle's pasture, saddled up in the woods, and rode away. Nobody said a word until Higgins chuckled.

"That beats payin' hard-earned money fer a hoss!"

Adrien felt nervous. Riding a stolen horse, he trembled in his saddle at the very thought of pursuit. Even the good rifle across his pommel failed to comfort him; he could draw no trigger in so foul a quarrel.

At the first suspicion of a break in the forest, Low Joe branched off alone. He knew this country as a rabbit knows his brier-patch, and, being unfavorably regarded therein, it was safer for Joe to travel his own devious path.

Five miles farther, Buddy and Spike turned off to the left. Adrien saw no path,

but supposed they knew where they were going. Once Tite Higgins stopped on the crest of a little ridge and listened.

"Thought I heard 'em comin'; somebody is goin' to come, an' come fast. Quare, ain't it, how skittish a feller feels! I never rides easy whilst I'm on the same hoss in the same neighborhood."

Adrien felt a convulsion in his throat.

"What you reckon would happen ef they caught us?"

"Now? On these hosses?" Tite jerked his thumb upward, with significant gesture. "I reckon that's 'bout the handiest limb."

"Ride!" suggested Adrien.

Tite Higgins threw back his head and laughed.

"Narvous? Used to be that way myself, ef I warn't sartin o' my hoss. I seen a little hoss one time—ef I was straddle o' *her*, they mought chase and be durned. It was a little stockin'foot mare—follered her all the way from Alabama nigh to Natchez."

"And never caught her?" Adrien blurted out.

"No—danged shame; us fellers kilt her—didn't mind knockin' the ole Frenchy in the head, but 'twar a powerful pity to shoot the stockin'foot."

Tite's revelation came with such startling unexpectedness that Adrien gasped. Higgins had paused on the summit of a ridge, where horse and man were silhouetted against a dull sky. Adrien could trace every line of his figure—small head, long, skinny neck, like a plucked goose, and gaunt body. Adrien could not reconcile this with the black-whiskered man whom he carried in his mind's eye—the stranger that joined them on the road from Marengo.

"Come along, pardner!"

Higgins loosed his rein and rode on slowly. Adrien did not stir, holding his horse in check with tight bridle and steady eye—immovable as bronze. There rode one of the men who had choked Cecile and struck his father. Adrien *knew* it, but could not *feel* it—not yet. He had tried to keep his blood cool for that supreme moment when this man and himself should come face to face—when he should tell him why, and then kill him. Adrien thought of the bandage about his father's head, of the bruises on Cecile's throat—and gripped his rifle.

Higgins turned.

"Hurry up, Trotter! We got to scatter a mighty heap o' dust befo' mornin'."

XXIII

ADRIEN DE VALENCE rode with a slack bridle and a tight-clenched lip. The rushing air of night filled his lungs; the leap, leap, leap of a good horse stirred his blood. It was hard riding, that stump-cluttered road in the dark; but Adrien never thought of that. He thought only of those brutal finger-marks at Cecile's throat, that bloody bandage about his father's head. He thought only of the man who loped on in advance, the man who had done these things, the man whom he would kill. But there were ways in which a gentleman could not kill a dog.

Ten yards ahead of him Tite Higgins rose and fell in his saddle. Adrien eyed him and considered coolly; for there were greater considerations than his own private vengeance. Higgins was a mere pawn in Old Shack's grand design, and to kill him would count for nothing. Adrien must wait as patiently as youth can wait when blood runs like fire and nerves are tingling.

All night long Tite Higgins never drew rein, clattering through the clearings and splashing across the fords until the blush of morning reddened in the east.

"Mighty nigh thar," he called back; "an' 'tain't none too soon!"

Wheeling into a path among the briers, he walked his horse into deep woods, where a lone cabin crouched at the edge of a canebrake. Tossing his bridle to Adrien, he approached the cabin on foot and rapped cautiously. A voice answered within, the door cracked open, and a whiskered face peered out. Tite muttered a word or two, nodded his satisfaction, and beckoned for Adrien to come up.

"Loosh says it's all safe; we'll hide in the bushes till it gits dark agin."

The whiskered man slouched out barefoot, hitching his galluses over his shoulders. He scarcely lifted his eyes, but led the horses into the canebrake by a path whose yielding reeds closed behind them like a curtain. At a secluded opening he stopped. Tite glanced around him. Adrien could see the glint of water.

"Homochitto River?" Tite inquired.

Loosh answered with a nod, took off the saddles, hobbled the horses, and turned them loose to browse on sprouts of cane. Then he departed as he came, in silence.

Tite proceeded to make himself comfortable, pulling down armfuls of gray moss, and spreading his couch beneath an elm. He folded his coat on the saddle for a pillow and kicked off his heavy boots.

"Trotter, you lie down fust an' take yo' snooze; I'll set up a while. We can't run no risks."

Adrien was very tired. He took off his own coat, spread it over the moss, and lay down.

"Shuck them boots," Tite suggested. "Tain't nothin' eases a feller like givin' his feet a chanst to scatter."

Tite bent over and took hold of Adrien's boot—the boot with the cipher in it. Adrien jerked back.

"Let 'em alone; skeeters bites too bad."

"All right; they's yo' feet."

Tite returned to his tree and sat unblinkingly on guard.

Throughout the night Adrien had scarcely spoken, while tongue and headlong impulse chafed under the curb. He kept his steady gaze upon the ruffian ahead, determined that he would grow accustomed to his presence, meet cunning with cunning, and learn to smile without showing his fangs. The test came when Higgins touched the boot where the cipher was concealed, and Adrien, with half-shut eyes, had shaken him off. He had the mastery of himself—a clear-brained, intelligently dangerous man.

Sleep could not be fought against; he must sleep at times, be wholly within the power of these outlaws, and take his chances. It seemed that he had barely laid his head upon the saddle before Tite shook him.

"Hate to wake ye, Trotter, but here's some coffee an' breakfast."

Loosh was coming with a pot of coffee and a pone of corn bread. Adrien ate in silence and lay down again. In his doze he heard Tite say:

"Loosh, hurry up an' git them other hosses."

With a semiconsciousness that Loosh had gone, that Tite sat with his back against the elm, and that all the world was still, Adrien slept. Suddenly he started up, rifle in hand, aroused by a different noise from that of horses munching on the canes. Men were coming, several of them, and in his present state of mind Adrien was suspicious of everybody. Quickly he roused Tite, who sat nodding against the

elm, then wheeled to face the crackle of cane and the snapping of twigs.

Through a rift in the brake Loosh thrust his whiskered face, followed by a scoundrelly looking fellow in blue cottonade and hickory shirt, bearing the quarters of a deer across his shoulders. Neither of them spoke. It was the way of the woods.

Loosh and this new man, who was called Phil, raked together some dry twigs and built a fire that made wonderfully little smoke. Adrien watched them strip off long slices of deer-meat and spit them on switches of cane. The meat frizzled, and Loosh observed to Tite:

"I reckon y'all won't have no bother. Folks is 'bout quit buzzin' round axin' 'bout them fellers what made the drag at Judge Kinlock's."

Adrien maintained his drowsy attitude and listened alertly. Loosh volunteered again:

"I rid with 'em fer three days."

"Did you lead 'em to Stogdon's?" Tite inquired.

"Yep; Stogdon give 'em plenty news 'bout four men ridin' todes Pearl River, and one of 'em totin' somethin' heavy, looked like a box, acrost his saddle." Adrien kept his eyes shut and his ears open while Loosh mumbled on: "We heerd o' that box every few miles. Soon as I guided 'em clear out o' the country they lemme come back. Reckon them fellers rid plumb to Georgy."

Higgins chuckled contentedly.

"We told the speculators to give 'em plenty news—send 'em on their way re-j'icin'. Talk is purty well died down, ain't it?"

Loosh glanced up from the fire.

"Yep; ain't been nobody here for nigh onto two weeks; but the whole country is kinder on the lookout—better be keerful with them hosses."

"Is you ever heard of ole Tite raisin' a hullabaloo? Git up, Trotter, an' eat yo' vittles."

The men quit talking; all four squatted around, eating their venison and corn bread, with water from the river. Tite flung away his last crust and turned to Loosh.

"I reckon y'all better take them Corkle hosses some're else—jes' fer as ye kin—an' hide 'em. Mought cause too much argument ef a possey was to run up on us."

Without a word Loosh and Phil led off

the Corkle horses. Higgins rose and stretched himself, like a new-filled hound.

"Reckon I'll turn in an' sleep a spell. Trotter, you keep both eyes skinned—one on the ground fer snakes, an' t'other in the air fer bees."

Throughout the afternoon Adrien took his turn, standing guard and studying Tite Higgins as he slept—a face of wrinkled leather, wary and cunning. His long neck, which at times thrust out like an inquisitive terrapin, would always draw back again and shut its shell at the slightest touch. Adrien dared not risk alarming him with questions; he could only follow, wait, and be patient, growing restless at the approach of night.

Tite raised himself on his elbow.

"Ain't Loosh come yit with them new hosses? I hates to risk the ones we got. They's too infernally nigh home. Loosh says these folks takes on considerable whenever a hoss turns up missin'."

As the afternoon waned Tite made anxious trips to the edge of the canebrake, but came back disappointed. Night had almost settled down when Loosh and Phil appeared with two horses under halter—very good animals, and fresh. Tite assured himself of that, then demanded:

"Whar did them hosses come from?"

"Down Mobile way; we been had 'em more'n two months, an' no meddlers ain't come huntin' round here."

Tite nodded approvingly as Phil saddled the beasts.

"Now, Loosh, git them Corkle critters out o' here quicker'n greased lightnin'—cross the river to Ruff Hargus's, an' start 'em fer Arkinsaw."

"How are we goin' to git oun back?" Loosh inquired sulkily. "Them's all we got."

"I'll leave 'em at Tom Williams's stable in Port Gibson."

Phil came up and stood beside Loosh, both looking at Tite as if there were something yet to be done. Tite reached into his pocket and brought out four gold pieces.

"Here's ten dollars fer you, an' ten fer Phil," he said.

Loosh and Phil divided on the spot, each testing his own coins with his teeth. Tite turned to Adrien and smiled.

"See how us speculators works! No hitch—cap plans everything befo'hand. Spike is got rid of his one hoss long ago. Don't nobody need to give Spike no orders.

Them what Joe and Buddy had is on their way to Pascagoula swamp, and them two"—he nodded at the pair vanishing through the cane—"them two will be mashin' mud in Arkinsaw befo' old Corkle gits his saddle-girth buckled."

There were no good-byes to Phil and Loosh. Tite straddled his horse and they rode, keeping to the woods. When the heavens were black and the earth was still, Higgins made his way to a road and halted for Adrien to catch up.

"Yonder's the Natchez Trace—this road jines it jest ahead. Washington ain't more'n a mile off thataway." Adrien followed Tite's finger and tried to recognize the road by which he had traveled from Marengo. Tite spoke on doubtfully. "Ef I didn't have all this money, an' ef 'twarn't so dangerous, I'd sneak into Natchez an' ask our fellers ef they's ketched that young Frenchy yit."

"Who is he?"

"Young feller what cap's powerful anxious to lay hands on. Cap's skeered he knows too much—but cap tole me to come straight back, an' not switch off no-whar. Git up!"

Tite made a long détour through the woods to avoid some farmhouses at the forks of the Trace. Beyond those houses the road lay deserted. Twice they turned out, circling the glow of a camp-fire.

"I ain't takin' no chances, not till I gits this money safe to the cap'n. I reckon we mought jes' well cut straight through the woods and steer for Port Gibson. We'll hit another road after a while. It's rough ridin', but a heap safer."

Higgins did not know that he was possessed of a charm which, at the slightest mention, shifted the thoughts of his companion into far less dangerous channels. Adrien forgot everything in planning to separate from Tite and have a precious hour to himself—an hour with Cecile.

Dawn glimmered on the margin of the east while it was yet dark in the forest. Tite Higgins halted.

"Thar's the south fork o' Bayou Pierre right in yonder. We better hunt a hole; I'm tired."

It was a rugged country, much cut up with ravines. Tite dismounted at the foot of a mottled sycamore, whose white and gray spots shone in the darkness. Taking the bridle in hand, he began picking his way down the hill, to a much greater dis-

tance from the road than Adrien would have considered necessary.

"Here's the place; I'm going to sleep."

Hobbling the horse, and making a pillow of his saddle, he was asleep before his less-experienced companion had found a level spot to lie upon.

The stars had not faded when Tite touched Adrien's shoulder.

"I like ter make a slip. One of us is got to go to town, an' it better be you, 'cause thar's too many folks hereabouts what knows me. Leave yo' hoss."

There was no path. Tite threaded his way infallibly to the road and pushed through the underbrush that concealed it.

"You can't miss this sickamo' when you comes back. Keep the straight road and stop at the fust stable on the left-hand side—it's got 'T. R. Williams' painted over the door. Give Tom the sign, an' tell him to send old Jube out here with sumpin' t' eat; an' we need a couple o' good hosses by night. Ef Tom ain't there, jes' tell Jube. He's a nigger with one eye an' smallpox markin's; knows more rascality than was ever wropped up in nary 'nother piece o' nigger hide. You kin trust Jube."

Adrien trudged on through the gray gloom and the dust until the formless bulk of trees on either side began changing to ridge-poles and gables; ragged shadows gave place to a neat picket-fence. Then there were regular streets. He had no trouble finding the stable. At his rap a sleepy negro tumbled to the door—a one-eyed negro with pits of smallpox all over his face.

"Are you Uncle Jube?"

"Sho'ly, marster, sho'ly." Jube was accustomed to strangers appearing in the night-time, strangers who called him by name, and slipped away again.

"Whar is yo' massa?" Adrien used his broadest dialect.

"Mars Tom? He's done gone, two or three days." The single eye shone expectantly.

"Mr. Higgins wants sumpin' t' eat."

Jube grinned.

"Yas, suh; yas, suh; at de sickymo'-tree?"

"Yes, an' two good hosses to-night."

"Yas, suh; yas, suh; he'll sho' git 'em."

Jube asked no questions. He knew all there was to know, and bestirred himself into that activity which always produced a bit of cash.

Adrien took his seat at the back door of the stable, with the broadening dawn around him. Jube knelt on the ground, puffing out his cheeks like a bellows until the coals of last night's fire crackled up into a blaze. He filled the coffee-pot, frizzled the bacon, and deftly turned the hoe-cake.

"Is you gwine to eat yo' breakfus' here, or is you gwine back to whar Mr. Higgins is at?"

Adrien pointed to the door-sill beside him, where Jube set his cup of coffee, with a pewter plate. The coffee for Higgins Jube poured into a bottle, wrapped up the bacon and the hoe-cakes, then jumped on a bareback horse and galloped off.

Adrien immediately took out the letter which he had prepared for Pibrac, hurriedly adding details and descriptions of what had transpired meanwhile. At all hazards, he must post this letter in Port Gibson.

Jube stole back so noiselessly that Adrien scarcely had time to fold his letter and get it out of sight.

"Jube, kin you keep yo' mouth shut?" he inquired with a gold piece balanced on his fingers.

"Jube's grabeyard."

"Do you know where Colonel Buckingham lives—Yorktown Plantation?"

"Yas, suh; but"—warningly—"kunnel ain't no frien'."

"Yep, I know."

Adrien winked, held out the gold, and Jube grinned. Jube knew the tricks of speculators who had affairs of their own, the snapping up of unconsidered trifles which were never reported to headquarters.

"Kin you p'int out the place?"

"Yas, suh; yas, suh; 'tain't nowhars from here."

"When kin you go?"

"Jube ain't gwine go 't all; he gwine to send Demus."

"Who is Demus?"

"Dat's my boy; he deaf an' dumb, an' bline besides."

"All right, git 'im."

The lazier village people had not arisen from their breakfast-tables when a runty negro boy, bareheaded and barefoot, loafed along through the streets. Nicodemus took the southwest road, and Adrien followed at a distance. On and on the boy went, throwing at birds, stopping to pick blackberries, paddling across the creek, flitting

through a deep cut in the road overhung by locust-bushes. There being nobody in sight, he ducked down near a big white gate and waited for the white man.

"Dar 'tis."

Beyond the Yorktown gate a well-kept driveway wound and climbed among the forest trees. Morning sunlight struck a gable which looked down upon a noble park, rugged and natural, with underbrush cleared away, but not reduced to the conventional lawns and gardens of Kinlock Hall. Adrien reconnoitered the house from every side, which excited no curiosity in Nicodemus. His father's patrons often did the like, and something generally happened afterward. Adrien's idea was simple; he would find a secluded place near the house and write Cecile a note asking her to meet him.

A narrow footway led from the front gallery, passed beneath the honeysuckle arbor, meandered down a hillside, crossed the ravine on a rustic bridge, and lost itself in a thicket of sweet-smelling pines. This was an ideal trysting-place, no more than a stone's throw from the public road, and completely hidden. He sat down and scribbled a line, signed "Adrien."

"Come along, Demus."

Creeping as near to the big house as he dared, Adrien lay on a knoll which overlooked the gallery. It was not long before an old gentleman sauntered out with a cigar and seated himself comfortably. Then two girls ran, laughing, through the door. Several young men followed in riding-garb; a negro was bringing four saddled horses to the front.

Then he saw Cecile, dressed in one of her ravishingly simple morning dresses, strolling through the door, talking with a young man.

"Demus"—the negro boy lay close at his side—"Demus, look good at that young lady with the white dress and red sash. She has a book in her hand."

"Yas, suh; dat's Miss Kinlock."

"You know her?"

"Yas, suh, everybody knows *her* round here; she beats all dese young ladies ridin' a hoss."

Adrien gave him the note.

"Put this paper in her hand, and don't let anybody see you do it. I can wait all day, and here's five dollars waiting for you."

Demus popped out his eyes. In all his

life he never heard of a negro boy that had five dollars.

"Yas, suh," he stammered, and took the note.

"No, don't run to the house. Maybe she's going riding."

"Yas, suh, she goes a ridin' ev'y day."

Other girls appeared and other young men. Adrien noted them all as so many dummies that could see and talk, gossipy nonentities to be avoided. His eyes followed every movement of Cecile, who drifted down the steps, shaking her head and laughing over her shoulder. The young man came after her, half-way down the steps. She stopped, turned, waved him back, and held up her book. They parleyed; she shook her head again decidedly, then walked away from the house. The young man sat down on the top step and took out a cigar.

Cecile moved slowly along the path that led through the honeysuckle arbor, turning the pages of her book. Demus began creeping away, with eyes fixed and nostrils dilated, like a setter dog that scents a covey. Adrien caught his leg.

"Wait and see where she's going."

Absorbed in her book, Cecile passed through the honeysuckle arbor and down the hillside. In the ravine, out of sight of the house, she began to hurry, forgetting the book. She stopped and looked all around, as if expecting some one.

"Stay here, Demus," Adrien whispered, and went slipping down the farther side of the knoll.

His heart beat exultantly; Cecile knew he was coming. But how could she know? How could she possibly be expecting him? There must be some truth in this lovers' belief of hearts attuned to each other sending messages through space.

Adrien crawled half-way down the ravine. Now he could clearly see into the pine thicket. Suddenly he stiffened like a man of stone. Hot blood beat against his temples, then rushed away again and left him cold. A man's figure appeared from a clump of bushes. Cecile ran to him, ran into his arms. He held her close, very close, with her head nestling upon his shoulder.

Adrien dared not stir; he dared not turn his head. There was only the screen of a dogwood branch between himself and them. He could do nothing but stand and watch, and hate himself for spying.

Presently the two stood apart, the man clinging to Cecile's hand. Gently she disengaged herself, put both her hands against his breast, and seemed to be pleading with him to go. Adrien saw that she was trembling with excitement—that she was doing something against her will. Yet he knew that she wanted no interference. Cecile had come of her own accord, had met this man willingly.

"By Heaven, I know that man! That's *Buck Flint*, the infamous gambler from the Kangaroo!"

There was no mistaking Buck Flint, with the intensely black hair, the eyes of the insolent flash, the slender, upright figure—Buck Flint.

Cecile pushed Flint back from her. He came back, kissed her good-by, kissed her again. Cecile wrenched herself loose and went running toward the house. She ran down the slope, darted across the foot-bridge, hurried up the hill, and paused before she got to the top. The girl seemed to steady herself, and walked slowly back to the gallery with eyes upon the book.

Adrien turned; Flint was standing where Cecile left him, at the edge of the pine thicket, watching the path by which the flutter of her dress had vanished.

Then Adrien saw something else. Two men were creeping up behind the gambler, with eyes fixed upon his immovable figure. They must have rustled a branch or broken a twig. Flint wheeled, struck the foremost man, and knocked him crashing among the underbrush. Two other fellows ran out, and all four went down together.

Nobody called aloud; so far as Adrien could hear, they said absolutely nothing. There was no noise, except the scramble of their bodies on the ground.

After a desperately silent struggle one of the men got up; then two others arose. One remained kneeling beside Flint, who lay still, face upward. They lifted him to his feet with arms pinioned and a gag in his mouth. Their swiftly consummated business had not occupied a minute. Flint walked without difficulty, as they led him to the denser woods and were gone.

Adrien couldn't think. In a storm of blackness and chaos he knew nothing more until he had stumbled out to the road and reached the deep cut on their way to town. Demus touched his sleeve.

"Look out, mister!"

Cecile and a young cavalier came gallop-

ing like mad. Cecile was laughing excitedly, and her face was flushed. Adrien stood aside, his hands clenched.

"Mister, what's I gwine to do wid dis?" Demus held out the note.

Adrien snatched it, tore the paper into bits, and stamped savagely upon it.

"Here, boy!"

He held out the piece of gold. Demus ran off and left him choking in the dust.

XXIV

THURSDAY, a hot night. Seven men sweltered in that upper back room of the Kangaroo—seven speculators, shirt-sleeved and sullen, who had ceased talking and no longer looked at one another. Old Shack sat at the end of the dumpy table, his shirt yawned open, and the stubby beard brushed his throat.

"I tell you we've got to find that young Frenchy!"

No man answered him. Shack had said little else at their conferences during the last month.

Adam North glanced furtively at Hullum. Hullum stooped to pat his pointer dog, which lay on the floor beside him. McCall squirmed in his seat. McCall always squirmed when there was danger. Gid Barlow tilted his chair against the wall, caught his heels in the rungs, and smoked on. Wild Bill and Smith whispered together over a corner of the table, then turned inquiringly to their chief.

A lone candle burned red and steadily on the table; tobacco-smoke uprose to the ceiling and gathered in a lowering cloud. Wild Bill couldn't stand the silence; he moved restlessly.

"Them Orleans sports oughter watched whar he went to—then got him."

Bill failed to understand procrastination when it came to "gittin'" objectionable persons.

Old Shack's hand lay across the table, palm down and stumpy fingers outspread. Slowly he raised his bushy beard and fastened those boring eyes on Barlow.

"Gid, you had no business lettin' him git away."

Gid's chair came down with a bang.

"I did everything I could, cap. Slim Jim and the Bronco searched his room at half past ten, whilst he was writin' a letter—then he went up-stairs about eleven. We got in the room about two o'clock in the mornin', but he was gone."

Shack's eyes rested upon Barlow's face as the New Orleans gambler explained that fiasco for the hundredth time. Barlow always limped along to the same unsatisfactory conclusion—that young De Valence had disappeared, and a persistent, even a desperate, search had failed to locate him. Nobody had been killed in gambling-houses or resorts, and none held up on the streets who could be identified as young Frenchy. The speculators always knew the facts about such happenings.

"Jes' nacherly 'vaporated, an' ain't been back to Natchez," little McCall whined peevishly.

"No," snapped Barlow; "I've told you that forty times."

Shack's voice came very low in the stillness.

"That's what makes me feel so damnable onrestless. He ain't the kind o' sport to leave a hotel without footin' his score, jes' because a thief broke into the room. *Must* ha' been somethin' else. What else? That's what pesters me. Ef he had that cipher book"—Adam North shifted uneasily—"ef he had that cipher book, and knew what it was—and *knew what it was*," Shack repeated with sinister emphasis, "he would know we'd kill whoever had it, and he'd lie low. But then, again, he ain't the kind o' sport to lie low an' do nothin'. He's alive an' *he's workin'!*"

Wild Bill sprang up like a tiger in the jungle glaring about for the hidden hunter.

"I wish I could see the bushes shake—jes' once. Gets me all-fired narvous fer a feller to be still-huntin' behind my back."

McCall glanced apprehensively over his shoulder. Hullum's dog got up languidly and looked about him. Shack turned.

"Dick, what all was in that book, exactly?"

"Jes' what I told you—settlements and things like that; assignments for the big work."

"The names, the banks, and all?"

Hullum nodded. Gid Barlow offered a suggestion:

"Looks to me like the surest place to catch him would be at Natchez; he ain't goin' to stay away from that girl very long. Our fellers are watching Kinlock's house night and day. She's gone to Port Gibson, an' if he follers her there they'll grab him."

Shack drummed on the table with his fingers.

"Barlow, you've got to go back to Orleans and have that town raked with a fine comb." Barlow shrugged his shoulders helplessly. Old Shack insisted: "Never mind; s'arch it again. Send for your friends. They are down-stairs."

Barlow rapped on the door from the inside; the outer guard listened to his instructions, then despatched a messenger. In a few moments half a dozen fellows came tramping through the hall—the same men who had joined Gid Barlow on the General Jackson. They ranged themselves beside the table while Old Shack gave a minute description of Adrien de Valence.

"Now go git him. Don't make no difference how—*git him!*"

When the men had gone Old Shack braced himself.

"We must send to Natchez an' stir 'em up. I'm scared to turn a wheel until we know what's become o' that cipher book."

Frank Cabler fidgeted, sprang to his feet, and slapped on the table. "I'm for raisin' all kinds o' trouble."

Cabler was young and headstrong. Shack stopped him.

"Sit down an' keep still; that's jest it—you've been raisin' too many kinds o' trouble." Although Cabler remained standing, Shack quietly spoke his mind. "This used to be the best town in the South for headquarters. We could come and go; among so many sportsmen, strangers, and land-hunters, nobody noticed us. I've kept a tellin' you fellers to spend plenty cash; that's why the merchants argues that gamblin' makes flush times. Go 'long nice and polite; then ef some young fool gits hurt at the Kangaroo everybody'll say 'twas his own fault." Shack pointed straight at Frank Cabler. "But sence you've started this trouble-raisin' we can't walk the streets without a lot o' fellers looks cross-eyed—can't hear nothin' 'cept that infernal court-house bell callin' public meetin's—givin' gamblers notice to leave town."

"Leave town and be danged!" Frank Cabler swore. "There's more of us than there is o' them, an' we'll clean 'em out. Nothin' but a lot o' shirt-tail boys an' preacher chaps—they won't fight!"

"Don't fool yo'self, Cabler. I seen lots of 'em with Old Hickory at Orleans. I was there."

Cabler curled his thin lips and showed his teeth.

"If I leave this town, I'll leave it in flames!"

"Shut your mouth, fool; *sit down!*"

The defiant young outlaw stood bracing his left hand on the table, half sneering at Shack. Those gray eyes pierced him through.

"Frank, you an' Dick Hullum, listen to me. Everybody knows that you two are pardners. You've got this town so het up that we can't stay in it. Now sell this outfit and get away."

"Danged ef I do!" Dick Hullum answered promptly, from his seat against the wall.

"You *must* do it," Shack insisted quietly. "You can't run this place five minutes unless I say so. I'm goin' to fix a fair price, an' Gid Barlow buys you out. That's the word with the bark on it."

"Cap, I don't much like that—" from Hullum.

"Neither do I, Dick, but it's got to be did; *you* know it, an' *I* know it. When them folks up-town gits to talkin' about you and Frank Cabler, it's jes' like rubbin' pepper on a billy-goat's whiskers—they itches to butt somebody. We've got to keep 'em pacified. There'll be plenty excitement when the time comes. O' course, you an' Frank kin be on hand for that, an' git your share."

"And wipe out a lot o' old scores," Cabler added, his face getting redder than his mustache. Cabler had taken a seat; now he popped up again, with his right hand behind him. "Cap, I don't allow nobody to tell me what I *got* to do."

"Except me. Sit down; *sit down*, I say!"

Wild Bill dragged Cabler down by the coat-tail.

"Set down, Frank; don't ack a plumb fool."

Old Shack dismissed the incident without another glance at either man. His mighty arm relaxed on the table, his head bowed in thought, his beard rested upon his chest. Presently he looked up.

"Hullum, how would it do to send Buck Flint to Natchez—offer him big money ef he'll find that book?"

"Me an' Buck don't gee, but I onderstan' he's well acquainted in them parts. Buck's a curious feller, an' won't stan' in on no deal of ourn."

"He wouldn't balk at makin' a few thousand?"

"Not if he thinks it's straight. Buck's got quare idees 'bout what's straight. You might try him."

"We can't be no worse off than what we is. Where is Buck?"

"Don't know; he's been gone for a couple o' days."

When Shack sent Gid Barlow for Buck Flint, every speculator knew it was not done on the impulse of the moment; Shack had pondered long and arrived at his deliberate conclusion.

Gid Barlow left a hush behind him, unbroken, until footfalls came along the passage. Dick Hullum nervously stroked his dog; he didn't relish this calling of Buck Flint into consultation. But that was not Flint's walk. Hullum listened again. The guard came in and closed the door behind him before speaking.

"Tite Higgins an' that new feller is got back again."

"Let 'em in."

High-headed, Tite strutted through the door; he had a report which any speculator would be proud to make, flanked up by more than two thousand dollars in gold. Adrien stopped just inside the room, within reach of the knob, and remained standing.

While the others were intent upon what Higgins would have to say, Adrien searched their faces one by one. Three of them he knew by sight—Old Shack, Gid Barlow, and Dick Hullum. Hullum looked at him once with half-puzzled expression, as if groping in the dark for something he could not find.

"Well, cap!" Tite stood jubilantly before the table and dropped his bag with a jingle. "Cap, we made a fine drag, got our niggers safe to Welter, an' picked up a broad-horn barge on the way—barge an' cargo wuth ten thousand dollars." Tite opened his bag and poured out the gold. "I give every one o' the boys a extry hundred, jes' fer greens. Here's a money-paper fer the balance."

Shack took up Welter's draft and glanced at the figures. His eyes danced.

"Higgins, you're a noble spirit; how did it happen?"

Shack lay back in his chair, fingering the draft, while Tite told of their scout down the Big Black, herding the negroes, finding the barge, dumping Captain Ed, and the sale to Welter.

"All of it come to ten thousand four hundred and seventy-five dollars. Old

Welter tried to skin us out of a thousand, but Tom Trotter was too sharp for him. Tom's a keen 'un, he is—cute as a Yankee; made Welter shell out t'other thousand slicker'n goose-grease. Trotter shore done himself proud."

Higgins waved his hand like a showman, and directed all attention to Adrien. In that moment Adrien began to hear the fluttering notes of Will o' the Woods playing upon his pipe—as if the wailing tremolo of a screech-owl were coming from across the bayou.

Old Shack had been examining Welter's draft. Suddenly he brought down his fist upon the table.

"That infernal scoundrel, the—"

Higgins leaned over anxiously.

"What's the matter, cap? Ain't that money-paper all keerect?"

Adrien took a forward step, forgetting his determination to keep near the door. The music across the bayou rose to a higher pitch; Dick Hullum shuffled his feet to keep from hearing it. Old Shack lifted his voice above the whistling.

"Yes," he almost shouted, "the draft is drawn all right; but didn't I tell you not to take no money-paper for later'n the 1st o' December?"

"Shore, cap, you tole me that, an' I ain't forgot; but that was only fer the niggers. Bein' as this barge an' truck come to so much more'n what the niggers did, I calkerlated you mought be willin' to allow Welter another month to scrape up the money."

"Another month! Another month! Welter wrote this for the 1st of January, 1836—an' *don't never expect to pay it!*"

"Why not?" Adam North inquired.

That shrill whistling across the bayou had disconcerted Old Shack. His features writhed and twisted.

"Because the cunning scoundrel knows that after the night of December 25, 1835, there won't be no Bank of Louisiana—an' we'll be on our way to Mexico!"

Every man stood, or sat, just as that startling declaration caught him—motionless, breathing hard.

"Christmas night!" Adam North exclaimed, springing up in supreme excitement. "Christmas night! So that is the time?"

"The night and the hour!"

Frank Cabler swung his cap and stifled a cheer. The group of spellbound men be-

gan to stir restlessly, suppressing their excitement.

"Christmas night! Christmas night!"

The watchword passed in suggestive whisperings. Old Deuce, Hullum's dog, ran about, looking for something. Shackelford Orr backed into a corner and stood snarlingly at bay; he was trapped, like a sly gray fox that had dashed too far from its den. He need not look at these men to know that they understood. Their significant glances had made Adrien understand.

"I knowed 'twas comin'," the slow-minded Higgins blurted out, "but I ain't heerd you done sot the day."

"Shut up, fool!"

Shack clamped his lips like a vise, and everybody looked at Tite. No one glanced toward the unimportant Trotter, who stood with his back against the door, nerves tenser than resilient steel, and brain as clear as a frosty bell.

Outside, somewhere in the throbbing spaces of the night, Will o' the Woods kept playing upon his pipes, and the sound persistently crept in.

XXV

WHEN Dick Hullum sprang up, something in his gesture and the ring of his voice caught Adrien's attention—something familiar, well remembered, yet far away and baffling. Like some elusive perfume, it vanished when he sought to make it tangible. Adrien knew that man, had seen him, talked with him—but when and where? For the moment this seemed of no importance; he must not lose a word of what those others were saying about the Christmas insurrection.

Not until Hullum sat down again, and stretched his hand across the table, did Adrien recognize those long, thin, nervous fingers—the same that he had observed on the journey from Marengo—the same fingers which Cecile described so vividly as having throttled her. He glanced down at Hullum's boots—soft, exquisitely fitting boots—and thrilled with certainty. Yet he kept his composure and stood as motionless as those eager speculators who hung upon Old Shack's words.

"Gentlemen"—looking slowly about him from man to man—"tain't that I mistrust none o' y'-all, but it's a heap safer for jest *one man* to know a thing like that. You see how onexpected I let my foot slip. Ef seven men knowed it, 'twould be jes'

seven times as many chances o' some fool spittin' it out—same as I done. Now forgit it. 'Tain't never to be mentioned to me, to yo'self, or nobody. Dick, send a man out yonder to chase that infernal idiot away; he pesters me."

As Hullum gave orders at the door, Shackelford Orr moved back to the table and sat down, amid a long, hard-breathing silence. The others resumed their seats and watched the captain as he kept fingering Welter's draft. Presently Old Shack lifted his eyes and carefully scrutinized each man in turn, as if measuring them for some purpose.

"Tite; you say Tom Trotter acted well?"

"Splendid, cap, splendid—all 'ceptin' the time I rigged 'im 'bout how quick he knocked that old flatboatman in the head."

Tite glanced humorously at Trotter. Old Shack looked up.

"Was he the feller what done that?"

"O' co'se"—Tite winked—"we allers tells it that way."

"Good," the captain agreed; "that makes him one of us. He knows how to figger?"

"Figgered old Simon Welter out of a clean thousand dollars, an' that takes right smart of a clerk." Tite laughed almost hysterically, glad of a chance to break the stillness.

"Come here, Trotter." Shack held out the draft; Adrien stepped forward wonderingly. "Ketch the first boat down the river; go straight to Simon Welter, and make him write that paper for the 1st of December, instead o' January. Dress up different; buy some good clothes, so folks won't know you."

Adrien held a tight rein on himself, remembering his drawl; he *must* remember that drawl when Dick Hullum was gazing at him with such a look of intent and puzzled inquiry.

"Well, cap, s'posin' Mr. Welter ain't willin' to change this here paper?"

"I don't give a thrip whether he's willin' or not. I made him rich, an' he knows which side his bread's buttered on. Tell him I say so, an' he'll do it. Welter's got a wife an' two daughters, an' a big plantation; he can't git away." Shack scribbled something on a scrap of paper, and handed it to Adrien. "This is Thursday night. The Nancy Moore clears for Orleans about twelve o'clock Monday—git aboard."

"All right, cap"; and Adrien turned.

"Wait; where's yo' baggage?"

"Lef' it to Mrs. Yarbor's boardin'-house, whar I aimed to sleep at."

"Go get it. Hullum, can't Jule make a bunk for Trotter up yonder on the hill?"

"I reckon so."

"Trotter can stay with Skinny an' lie low until time comes to catch the boat. Trotter, you ain't to leave that house—what's that?"

The imperturbable guard, who always stood in the hall, apparently stupid, apparently seeing nothing, had burst in excitedly without knocking, bent over, and whispered something into Shack's ear.

"What's that? Good!" Shack bounded up, started out, stopped himself, and turned. "Fellers, Waddy Mann has ketched young Frenchy. Fetch him in!"

Hullum, North, and Wild Bill leaped to their feet and rushed toward the door.

"Sit down," Shack warned them sternly.

"Act like nothin' happened."

The speculators dropped into seats, and sat as if their chairs were hot. Shack resumed his place. Adrien saw his big hand tremble as it lay before him on the table. Tite Higgins kept in a corner, hoping that Shack would not think to send him away.

Adrien edged nearer the door, every nerve thrilling and senses sharp. The outlaws had evidently captured some man whom they supposed to be himself, and it was quite evident that Shack meant to talk with the stranger before killing him. Adrien determined to prevent this unthinkable crime—in one sure way, if that were the last resort. No innocent man should die in his stead.

Nine men waited in the smothered stillness of the room, apparently unmindful of the stranger's coming. Adrien and Tite Higgins fixed their eyes upon the door when it opened to admit three men—one on either side, leading a third. This third figure had a long cloak thrown about the shoulders, which concealed his identity, the face being muffled beyond all possibility of recognition, and the elbows tied behind. Everybody looked at him now, anxiously and expectantly, for he could not see them.

Waddy Mann marched his prisoner to the table and halted him in front of Old Shack—dark-haired, tall, slender, and straight as a young pine, fitting the description of young Frenchy which had gone broadcast among the speculators. Waddy's face glowed with elation.

"We tole you we'd git 'im, cap, fust time he poked his nose in *our* bailiwick!"

Shack regarded his captive with cold-blooded deliberation. The young fellow bore himself with a defiance which no disguise or helplessness could hide. Shack realized that he would need all his cunning.

"Take off them blindfolds."

Waddy stripped the prisoner's cloak and began untying knots.

"We come all the way from Big Black in a kivered wagin, an' nobody ain't seed 'im till now."

Shack nodded impatiently and motioned the men to hurry. The mufflings dropped; Shack stumbled up, clutching the edge of the table and staring:

"Buck Flint!"

Flint faced them calmly, the only man in the room who kept his head.

"To what am I indebted for this extraordinary honor?"

With a startled oath, Dick Hullum overturned his chair in getting up.

"Buck Flint!"

Adrien de Valence gasped; but no one was thinking of him, every eye being fastened upon that pinioned gambler. Old Shack, dumb with surprise and disappointment, stood half erect, half leaning forward, resting heavily upon the table. Flint confronted him, as if Buck were the accuser, and not the captive.

"What do you want of me?"

Shack sank slowly into his chair, all the life and spirit and venom gone.

"It was a mistake, Mr. Flint; I am sorry."

"Mistake?" Waddy Mann ejaculated. "This is the feller you want. Ain't he tall, black-haired, mighty high-toned, about twenty-eight or thirty? Warn't he hidin' aroun' in them woods a sparkin' that gal?"

Flint glanced at Waddy as if he were puzzled, and seeking to comprehend.

"Shut up, Waddy." Shack lifted his clenched fist. "Git out o' here!"

Waddy, with his crestfallen partner, slunk through the door.

De Valence understood in a flash; spies had been set upon Cecile, hoping to trap the young Frenchy—and they caught the wrong man. But Flint, this insolent gambler from the Kangaroo, why was he lurking in Colonel Buckingham's woods? Why was Cecile meeting him secretly? There was no answer to these questions. Adrien did not know; he *must* know!

Meanwhile, Old Shack spoke on like a beaten man.

"Mr. Flint, I'm sorry about this mistake. Higgins, ontie them ropes."

Flint kept studying Old Shack, but as if he scarcely saw the gray man; he was gazing steadily and thinking steadily, thinking of what Waddy had blurted out. Just as steadily he spoke his mind.

"Mistake? So you were setting a trap for some one else—some man who would be slipping around in the woods trying to see—"

The gambler checked himself; Adrien instinctively thanked him for not dragging Cecile into such a brawl.

Shack seemed glad to interrupt.

"Yes, yes; a mistake"—which was all he could say, or would say, and Shack kept repeating it. "A mistake—mistake!"

Flint's arms were now unbound; he stretched them vigorously to flex the muscles. Once he opened his lips, then held a tongue that could not loosen without involving a lady's name.

Shack did not look up.

"Mr. Flint, what did those men take from you?"

Flint laughed, holding out his empty arms.

"They left me these."

"Took your purse an' your pistols?"

"Pistols first."

"Get 'em, Tite."

Higgins sprang to the door. Flint waited until Tite returned from the hall with his purse and a brace of pistols.

"Give 'em to him," Shack ordered.

"Them fellers never fotched yo' hoss, Mr. Flint," Tite volunteered. "We'll send him up to yo' house, with yo' saddle-bags."

Flint did not seem to hear; he was examining his pistols, loads and caps and locks. Indicating satisfaction that they were all right, he stuck them into his belt.

"Mr. Flint, I am very sorry."

The regret in Shack's voice rang true, because of their failure to catch young De Valence. Flint looked straight down into the eyes of the man before him, smiling contemptuously.

"I am somewhat inclined to believe you, Captain Jarrot; I think you are probably telling the truth, but it's difficult to imagine why. You need not have taken so much trouble had you merely wanted a little chat with me. Am I now entirely at liberty to withdraw?"

"Open the door, Tite. Mr. Flint, I hope you won't have no hard feelings."

"None whatever; errors are bound to occur in your line of business."

Flint stopped midway of the open door and bowed. Behind him lay freedom and safety, but he could not restrain a desire to enjoy their visible disappointment.

"I wish you a pleasant evening and merry company!"

The words were courteously spoken, but conveyed a subtle insult beneath which every speculator writhed, as if impaled upon the point of a weapon that he could feel, but could not parry.

Hurried steps approached, and Gid Barlow entered. He halted in astonishment to see Buck Flint.

"You got him?" Mr. Flint, I looked everywhere for you."

This reminded Old Shack.

"Yes, we want to see you, Mr. Flint. Barlow went to find you."

"How fortunate"—Flint bowed again—"how fortunate that I have so happily arrived."

He glanced around, smiling at those sullen faces, lighted by a single candle in a smoke-filled room. All of them were now looking at him, except Dick Hullum, who persistently patted his dog, with eyes upon the floor.

"Mr. Flint, are you willin' to set down an' talk plain with us?"

"Surely, Captain Jarrot, there need be no subterfuges between us; we understand each other clearly—quite clearly."

"McCall, give the gentleman your chair. Set down, Mr. Flint."

"Thanks!"

Flint sat opposite Shack, a candle on the table between them. Again Flint's glance circled the room with its thin bed in the corner, curtains carefully drawn, and the gray man at the table. Around the walls, half in shadow, sat his mute and moody listeners.

"Mr. Flint—"

"Captain Jarrot!"

"We sent for you—"

"Very efficiently; I am here."

"Mr. Flint, will you give yo' word not to repeat what I am goin' to tell you?"

"Certainly; I shall treat your communication as confidential."

Buck Flint could keep his word, and Shack knew it.

"Are you willin' to talk plain?"

"Quite plainly, I assure you."

Flint smiled again—the incomprehensible smile of a different atmosphere from that in which Shackleford Orr was born.

"Would you be willin' to do a good turn fer us, ef 'tain't much trouble an' means big pay?"

Something in Flint's face told Shack that he was beginning to blunder.

"I should be pleased to render service to the *sporting* gentlemen here assembled"—with an emphasis on the "*sporting*" which galled Dick Hullum.

Being somewhat thicker of hide, Old Shack went on:

"We've got ticklish work, and you could do it for us."

"Well?"

It always threw Old Shack off his balance when the other fellow listened so composedly, but left him to do all the talking. Flint kept listening, and kept Shack at the laboring oar.

"Will you 'gree to do it?"

"Despite my great confidence in *sporting* gentlemen, I must inquire the nature of your work. My talents are limited."

Shackleford Orr knew how to handle men—that being his trade; but men who used perfect English, and very little of it, were mighty slippery to catch hold of.

"You know a lot o' folks aroun' Natchez?"

"Pardon me; you are asking questions—which is contrary to good morals at the Kangaroo."

Shack jockeyed for another start.

"You dresses dandified—can mix up with big bugs and gentlemen."

"Thanks!" Flint bowed gravely.

The captain had failed to lead up gradually, so he plunged in:

"One of our friends lost a book in Natchez. We'll give you ten thousand dollars to get it back."

Adrien de Valence could not suppress a startled movement, which might have been observed had not the speculators been so intent upon Flint's reply.

"Ah, I see! You are a collector of rare books?"

Shack's stumpy fingers played nervously with the candle.

"'Tain't no readin' book; it's got writin' in it."

"It contains valuable papers—personal, I presume?"

"You mought call 'em papers; least-

wise, they've been lost or stole. We can put you on the trail of a feller what knows where they are."

"Ten thousand dollars for a memorandum-book?" Flint arose and pushed back his chair. "Captain Jarrot, I do not know the exact nature of your business, but I do know the character of your confederates here. They are gamblers, like myself; with the difference that I do not cheat or engage in criminal operations."

Dick Hullum jerked himself straight. The others half arose; Shack leaned forward in his chair. Flint stepped backward a pace, looking from one to the other, watchful as a cat.

"Keep your temper. Captain Jarrot requested me to talk plainly, and I shall. I have no knowledge of your operations, beyond what every man with eyes and ears suspects. You would not offer ten thousand dollars to recover an ordinary memorandum-book; it must be criminal, and I shall have nothing to do with it. I wish you a very good evening."

"Hole up there!" Dick Hullum made his way around the table.

Flint looked him in the eyes and kept smiling—that same insolent, daring smile. McCall slipped from his chair and got ready to dodge a stray bullet; but if that pair began shooting, there would be no stray bullets.

Shack ran around the table and interposed his massive barrier between the two.

"Sit down, Hullum. Mr. Flint, you give me your word?"

"I shall keep it."

"You better go pretty sudden before some row bobs up."

Flint bowed derisively, never taking his eyes off Dick Hullum. Feeling behind him, he found the door-knob, opened the door, and backed out.

Hullum wheeled, his face flaming.

"Cap'n, I said I didn't like that feller."

"I never told him nothin'." Hullum's attack put Old Shack upon the defensive.

"I'd rather you'd tole him the whole danged thing—then I could kill him for knowin' too much. It sticks in my craw to let 'im laugh at me like that—an' git away!"

Hullum's voice rang out uncontrolled. It could have been heard in the hall, or through the windows. Somebody did hear it, and she let Dick know. It was Maggie Belle. Her voice pierced the door:

"'Tain't no use lyin' to me; Dick Hullum *is* in there. Lemme git in!" The guard tried to argue, but Maggie Belle insisted: "I want ter git Dick Hullum, an' you dassen't hinder me!"

Hullum crept stealthily to the door and listened.

"Dick Hullum! You Dick Hullum! Trot yo'self right out of that room." The other men behind were laughing. Hullum did not stir. Maggie Belle's demand came shriller and more peremptory: "Don't you hear that music? The ball's fixin' to begin, an' I ain't goin' to go down-stairs by myself!"

Hullum opened the door and slipped out, with Adrien immediately behind him. Old Deuce cocked his head on one side, and prudently declined to risk the angry lady's foot. Maggie Belle was gorgeously be-dizened and bejeweled. Hullum looked at her, first with a smile, then with a frown.

"Maggie Belle, I told you not to wear that"—pointing to something which sparkled on her breast.

"Well, ain't I *wearin'* it?"

The music floated up from below stairs; Adrien had to keep moving, and could not catch the words of Hullum's further protest. They wrangled on ahead of him, Hullum speaking low and earnestly; but there was nothing secretive in the tones of Maggie Belle.

"Ef she ain't a new gal o' yourn, then 'tain't no harm fer me to wear it. Needn't talk to me no more, Dick Hullum!"

They disappeared within their room, and the door slammed violently.

Adrien feared to excite suspicion by lurking in the hallway; he turned to the head of the stairs. Somebody was crouching there—a barefoot somebody, who bounded down the steps like a scared rabbit. Skinny laughed and came back.

"I was jes' a settin' thar lis'enin'. They been squabblin' all day 'bout some gal's picter. Maggie Belle wants ter wear it jes' to prove that it ain't a new gal o' Dick's. Oh, well," observed the wise lad, "ef they ain't fussin' 'bout her, it's 'bout that woman on the hill, or suthin' else."

Skinny's wizened face grew radiant, almost like a normal child who was happy in clinging to the hand of his friend. They were quite alone in darkness at the foot of the stairs. Adrien drew the boy to him.

"Skinny, did you find that box—the iron box you told me about?"

"Yep; I was aimin' to tell you fust chance. Dick's had a box hid in Maggie Belle's closet. I seen it when I sweeps."

"Can you get it?"

Skinny shook his wary head.

"I'm skeered."

"Could you show it to me?"

"Too many folks trailin' backards an' forrads to Maggie Belle's room, bein's as how thar's a frolic to-night."

"Can I see it to-morrow?"

"You mought git it to-morrow evenin', when Dick and Maggie Belle goes ridin'. 'Tain't nobody hangs around here in the evenin's—all of 'em goes up-town. I know, mister," Skinny suggested eagerly, "the woman on the hill is got a key."

"Got a key to Hullum's room?"

"Yep, she used to live in that room befo' Dick turned her out."

The boy shut up like a clam as Grogan's scowling face glanced in at the door. Skinny flattened himself against the wall, then slid out into the night.

Adrien passed on to the next room, adjoining the ballroom. Being taller, he could look over the heads of the crowd gathered to watch the dance. A bass-voiced negro was calling a reel for painted women and flashily dressed sportsmen, speculators, and young bloods out for a lark. Six other perspiring negroes on the platform made the music—three fiddlers, a clarinet, a tambourine, and a triangle. Hilarious feet kept time; strident laughter floated upward with the dust and smoke.

Then Buck Flint came, and Adrien could only see a pine thicket, with Cecile nestling in this fellow's arms—this darsingly handsome gambler, who stood with mocking smile, amused by a revelry in which he took no part.

Adrien never saw Will o' the Woods until the idiot loomed up suddenly in the doorway, like a scarecrow apparition from outer darkness. The boy stood gazing vacantly, bobbing his head in rhythm with the music. De Valence drew back and stooped behind the crowd. Will saw no one, his simple soul engrossed with the clarinet. Step by step he moved forward, mouth open, drinking in the music, wriggling, eel-like, through the group at the door, and vanished within the ballroom.

Will's sudden appearance roused Adrien to a realization of his constant peril. He had just witnessed a demonstration of the eagerness with which young Frenchy was

being sought. Above all things, he must communicate at once to Pibrac that Christmas night was the date set for the general uprising. Being the only man who knew this, he could take no chances.

Flint leaned carelessly against the wall, holding himself aloof from the gaping herd. Even as Adrien glanced at him, the lounging idler stiffened into the intense man of action. He strode forward, eyes focused and blazing. The smile and the carelessness were gone. At first Adrien welcomed the idea that Flint intended to attack him; but Buck was staring over Adrien's shoulder, without seeing him, looking at Maggie Belle, who had entered with Dick Hullum.

La Dame Volupté stood on tiptoe, trying to gaze over the heads of the crowd, her flushed face eager, her bosom heaving. It was at the woman that Buck Flint stared, and straight to her he went. Hullum was clearing a way for Maggie Belle into the ballroom. Flint neither saw Hullum, nor cared; he saw nobody but Maggie Belle, and nothing except a miniature that rose and fell upon her breast. Flint pushed two men aside and shoved himself in front of the woman.

"Give me that!" he demanded, scarce louder than a whisper. Maggie Belle threw one hand to her breast and drew back. "Give me that miniature, I say!"—so low that nobody seemed to hear him, except the woman and Adrien.

Adrien followed the pointing of Flint's rigid finger, and saw a duplicate, in frame and setting, of the emperor's miniature; but the face—the face was Cecile's—Cecile, in the costume she had worn on that gala night in New Orleans.

Maggie Belle promptly found her tongue and used it.

"Listen, Dick! Hear what this man's saying to me!"

Hullum wheeled.

"What did you say to her?"

They confronted each other, just as they had confronted each other in the room upstairs, except that Buck Flint was not smiling.

"I told your woman she must give me that!" His unwavering finger pointed.

"What the—"

"Give it to me, or I shall take it!" Flint's face grew white.

"Touch it if you dare!"

Like the striking adder, Flint's hand

shot out, snatched the miniature, and tore it loose. Hullum's hand moved just as swiftly; he fired from the hip. A blinding flash; Flint dropped; Maggie Belle screamed. Women shrieked from the ballroom, men rushed out; other weapons glittered beneath the candles.

Some one caught Dick Hullum's pistol—his gray-sleeved arm was turned into the air. Old Shack thrust the infuriated gambler backward, through the door at the foot of the stairs, and locked him in. Then Shack ran back with hands uplifted.

"Be quiet, every man of you. Get Mr. Flint out o' here!"

Half a dozen friends massed themselves around the fallen sportsman. John Redlaw knelt beside him and raised his head. A bloody streak crossed his forehead. Adrien saw the miniature sparkling in Flint's hand, and reached between a man's legs to snatch it. The shifting crowd hurled him aside.

"Is he dead?" a woman's voice cried out.

"Don't know," Redlaw answered.

Will o' the Woods darted out of the ballroom, bent over Flint, and laughed. Flint opened his eyes, his lips moved, his fingers tightened upon the miniature.

"Help me, boys," Redlaw called. "Let's take him up-town."

Friends of Hullum and friends of Buck Flint divided into hostile groups. Shack stood like a gray buffer between them, pointing an open way to the door.

Four men lifted Flint and bore him feet foremost, with the regular tread of those who bear a coffin. Adrien followed, keeping in the shadows, for fear of the idiot. Redlaw walked at Flint's head; Flint beckoned him and whispered something. Adrien caught only the last words:

"Ride quick—go at once. These gentlemen can take me to my room."

"All right!"

Redlaw started toward his horse. Flint held him fast and whispered again:

"Not to Natchez; she's at Port Gibson, at Colonel Buckingham's—"

Then a clatter of hoofs crossed the bridge, and John Redlaw was gone.

His friends put Flint into a carriage and hurried him off toward town. The noise of wheels had not died away before the music recommenced, and the bass-voiced negro was again calling figures for his interrupted reel.

Adrien de Valence stopped in the darkness at the corner of the Kangaroo, refusing to believe. He had seen that careless gambler transformed into a demon at sight of Maggie Belle wearing Cecile's miniature. Adrien could understand that, and would doubtless have reclaimed the miniature himself if Buck Flint had not forestalled him.

He stood bewildered, gazing after the carriage, until Skinny roused him by touching his hand.

"Like to got Buck Flint, didn't he, mister? That's the fust un I ever seen Dick Hullum miss. Reckon he shot high to keep from hittin' somebody else."

Adrien did not listen to the boy. Again and again, over and over, he heard those last directions of the wounded gambler:

"Not to Natchez; she's at Port Gibson, at Colonel Buckingham's!"

XXVI

SKINNY clung to Adrien's hand and gabbled on, pouring out the pent-up confidences of his starved childhood. "Dick Hullum kep' a tellin' Maggie Belle that picter was boun' to brew a racket. Dick's got another picter, jes' like that un, a settin' on his table, only t'other one's a man—feller wid sojer clothes on."

"Skinny, what does that picture look like?"

His friend's awakened interest delighted the lad. Skinny described the other miniature.

"The emperor!" Adrien exclaimed.

All of a sudden Skinny sneaked around the corner, when Tite Higgins came swinging past.

"Say, Trotter," Tite said, "the old man's mighty tickled at the way you done. He'll give you a whack at sumpin' big. I reckon you grabbed a fortune by the tail jes' about as quick as any young feller what ever jined. He told me to buy you some new clothes, an' git yo' baggage whar you kin lie low until time to catch the boat. Come along!"

Tite talked in snatches as they hurried toward town.

"We got to do things in a hurry—they folks keeps jabberin' about burnin' the Kangaroo. Some of 'em mought be fool enough to try. Dick Hullum is got a wrong idee; them folks ain't no cowards. When them easy-goin' fellers gits riled, they'll shore make you smell sulfur!"

There had been no wearying in revelry at the Kangaroo when Adrien returned with Higgins. The loud clarinet blew on, the bass fiddle grumbled, and the triangle jingled.

"Where's Skinny? Skinny!" Tite called. The boy was on the lookout for them, and flitted from a shadow. "Here, Skinny, take them saddle-bags, an' show Mr. Trotter to yo' room at Jule's house. Now, mind ye, keep yo' fly-trap shet—plumb shet." Skinny took Adrien's saddle-bags and dodged a kick. "Good night, Trotter—lie low!"

Skinny climbed the path ahead of Adrien, who followed with a large bundle wrapped in clothing-store paper.

Adrien scarcely knew what he was doing or where he was going, his mind dwelt so persistently upon that letter from Cecile which must be lying in Lynn Worthington's office; but he couldn't slip away from Tite Higgins to get it.

"To-morrow," he promised himself, and climbed on like a packhorse with his burden.

The house of the woman on the hill stood in a carved-out space along the bluff-side—four rooms clinging to the slant of a precipice, and threatening to topple upon the roof-top of the Kangaroo. Skinny opened the left-hand door.

"Jule ain't ter hum; she's went out," he said, looking into the next room.

"Who is Jule?"

"Gee, mister, don't you know Jule? She's the wife what Dick Hullum had befo' he took Maggie Belle."

Adrien sat down on the protesting bed, whose ticking, filled with corn-shucks, creaked like a new saddle. Skinny gazed enviously at the bundle. "Sto'-bought clothes, ain't they, mister? Lemme see 'em."

For the boy's amusement Adrien spread out a complete suit, better than what he wore, yet in harmony with his assumed character. Adrien kept the boy talking; he wanted to measure the lad and determine how far he could be trusted.

"You say Dick Hullum and Maggie Belle goes out ridin' in the evenin'?"

"Yep; jes' soon as it gits cool. Dick's all-fired proud o' that hoss. Faro Bob and Maggie Belle together, they shore is a pair o' good-lookers. You see, mister, thar was a feller what had a room up-stairs, an' he's gone away. They don't never keep it

locked. You kin hide in thar whilst I gits Jule's key an' onlocks Dick Hullum's room. Gittin' out with the box, that's the worrisome part. It's a mighty big box."

"Listen, Skinny; suppose I take this bundle and wrap the box inside, with paper around it, like clothes coming from the store?"

"That's it; I reckon you mought fetch it up here."

"S'pose Jule saw it?"

"Jule ain't goin' to tell," the boy announced positively. "She hates Maggie Belle wusser'n a pizen snake. Ef Jule takes a notion that Dick Hullum wants ter give sumpin' to Maggie Belle, she'll bite off her tongue befo' she'll tell."

Skinny had matured his wisdom in a sordid school; he knew what he knew.

At daylight next morning Adrien roused Lynn Worthington and got his letter from Cecile—shorter than usual, telling with a girl's enthusiasm of her arrival at Colonel Buckingham's, of preparations for the wedding, of the other guests, but not a word of meeting or expecting to meet Buck Flint. Adrien could not reason it out, yet the letter satisfied him. It gave him something to think about through a long day, while he worked, unspied upon, in Jule's house.

The woman never appeared. Having written his letter to Pibrac, and one to Cecile, Adrien made a pocket in the leg of his new boot, and hid the cipher. Under Shack's orders not to show himself, he could do nothing but sit and gaze from the window. Southward, beyond the bayou, rose the hills and hummocks of Vicksburg—hills beside hills, hills on top of hills, hills beneath hills.

It was nearly dusk when Hullum drove off with his high-stepping thoroughbred, and Maggie Belle beside him—Maggie Belle, who stepped just as high, but was blatantly plebeian. His liver-and-white pointer ran on ahead. Adrien slipped in at the back entrance of the Kangaroo and made his way up those narrow stairs. There was nobody in the upper hall; the vacant room stood open. Barefoot, Skinny padded noiselessly along the hall, opened the opposite door, then scuttled back to the house on the hill.

Adrien entered Hullum's room with a hatchet in his left hand and a pistol under his coat. The room was gaudily furnished—a four-poster bed lavishly becurtained and decorated, a big wardrobe in the cor-

ner, a wash-stand, and a mirrored dresser. Upon the center table, cluttered by incongruous spoils of many a robbery, stood the emperor's miniature. Adrien put this promptly into his pocket.

The closet, being a flimsy affair, yielded readily to his hatchet. Maggie Belle's petticoats hung inside, remnants of drabbed finery, several guns, a pile of pistols, but no box. The box was not under the bed, nor in the big wardrobe when Adrien broke it open with a crash, nor—

A key clicked in the lock; some one was trying the door. The intruder stood paralyzed and listened to a fumbling at the knob. Could it be Skinny? Adrien dared not call, but stepped behind a heavy curtain, holding his weapon ready.

The door opened and shut again, very softly. Some person had entered and was standing just within the room.

For many seconds, it seemed hours, there was no sound; Adrien could see nothing. Then a woman—it was a woman, a cloaked woman, who moved forward—stood beside the center table and gazed about her.

Adrien could see her distinctly now—a tall blonde, with the haggard aftermath of dissipated beauty. She stood perfectly erect, utterly still, yet quivering with excitement and struggling to control herself. Only her eyes moved—large blue eyes, deep-set and roving in their sunken sockets.

Dropping her cloak, she revealed a dress, worn, soiled, and tawdry in its trimmings, but exceedingly well made. She breathed tumultuously. Various objects about the room caught her eye, and her expression changed, as if some were new and some familiar. The broken closet and wardrobe did not interest her.

Mastering herself with supreme effort, she walked to the bed, drew aside the curtains, and fastened them back. Then she turned down the coverlet, leaving a white sheet exposed. The sunshine streamed un pityingly across the bed, and lighted up the woman's haunted face.

An upright shaving-stand stood near the window, within two feet of the man behind the curtain. Jule knew where to find what she wanted. She opened one of the drawers, took out a razor, and laid the shining blade upon a pillow.

From the bed she turned to the mirror, and began arranging her hair, tucking in the collar of her dress, and turning down

the lace around her throat. Her throat had once been round and full and very beautiful; now it was drawn into stringy lines, showing the bones and hollows.

Turning from the mirror, she stopped near the bed and looked about her, smiling as if to say good-by. Having composed herself upon the bed, face upward, and draped her skirts, she reached for the razor.

Adrien sprang out and grappled her wrist.

"Don't do that," he whispered.

Jule did not scream, as Adrien feared, but fought desperately.

"Lemme go, Dick, lemme go!"

Adrien lifted her bodily into an armchair, where she was helpless. Ceasing to struggle, she looked up and gasped:

"You ain't Dick? Who are you? 'Tain't no business o' yourn—I want to die!"

Restraining his own excited impatience, Adrien talked very gently, until the tempest of her futile passion spent itself in moans and murmurings.

"Come"—he took her by the arm—"let us get out of here."

Jule caught the arm of her chair and held fast.

"I ain't goin' nowhere. This is *my* room. Dick Hullum bought this furniture for me. I lived here, an' I got a right to die here." Adrien persisted in trying to lead her from the room, but she clung to the chair. "What are *you* doin' in Dick's room?"

The faded blue eyes betrayed little curiosity.

"I came to get something that belongs to me."

"Dick Hullum is got a heap o' things in here what belongs to other folks. Ain't you the young feller what Ole Shack sent up to sleep in my house?"

Adrien hesitated, and Jule smiled faintly; there was much of womanhood in her smile.

"You needn't be skeered to talk out. I ain't goin' to tell nothin' what'll help Dick Hullum an' that hussy. I hate 'em! I *hate* 'em!" She sprang up and began pacing the floor. "I done tried ev'y way I knows how to separate them two, an' I knowed *this* would do it. Ef Dick Hullum was to find me stretched on that bed with my th'ote cut, all on account o' Maggie Belle, he wouldn't have nothin' mo' to do

with her. I kep' a tellin' 'im an' tellin' 'im I would do it, an' hant him forever afterward. What's Dick got here that belongs to you?" she demanded suddenly.

Adrien nodded toward the closet.

"It was in there—iron box with a lot of jewelry that he wanted for Maggie Belle—"

"She sha'n't have it—sha'n't have it!"

Jule rushed to the closet, tore out those hated petticoats, and strewed them on the floor.

"Skinny said 'twas here, but Dick must ha' sent it away."

Jule seemed to be thinking.

"Dick's been gettin' kinder onrestless 'bout this Kangaroo. He's done hid a lot o' things whar nobody won't 'spicion it."

"Do you know where he sends 'em?"

"I don't 'zactly *know*, but thar is ways an' ways o' searchin' out."

"If you find that box, I'll give you a thousand dollars."

"A thousand dollars? That ain't fiddlesticks. Will it spite Maggie Belle?"

"Yes."

"I'll find it. We kin talk a plenty at the house. You skin out o' here, quick! They mought take a notion to come back."

Jule began pushing Adrien toward the door. The glittering razor lay where it had fallen. Adrien caught the woman's shoulder and forced her to look at him.

"Jule, you are not going—"

Jule laughed harshly.

"You bet I ain't, not whilst I got a livin' chanst to copper Maggie Belle. That's the reason I come here to kill myself. 'Peared like 'twas the onliest thing I could do."

She turned from him, and began rearranging the bed; then she looked at the broken doors of closet and wardrobe, and changed her mind.

"No, I'll let 'em stay jes' like they is. Dick Hullum's goin' to make a 'tarnal row when he finds them doors busted; but he'll shut up mighty glum ef he thinks I done it. I'll leave my cloak lyin' right thar. No, let that door be. Now git away from here quick!"

Darkness came on while Adrien was sitting in his room, trying to think. He must do something, and do it promptly. Old Shack had ordered him to go down the river on Monday's boat; and this was Friday night. He had recovered the emperor's miniature, and believed he knew

who had the iron box; but that was a long way from getting it.

Jule burst through the door, disheveled and in a frenzy of jubilation.

"Dick is packin' Maggie Belle away on the fust boat, up or down! Don't make no diffunce to Dick, so he gits her away from here. Ole Shack kep' a tellin' him to sell out and make a sneak ontill things gits still. Dick's jes' that stubborn, nobody can't bluff him. He ain't skeered o' nuthin', 'cept witches an' sech like."

Jule flopped herself down in a splint-bot-tomed chair, rocking forward and laughing hysterically.

"I wisht I could 'a' seed it! Dick was out ridin' with Maggie Belle, an' that ijit brother o' hern grabbed his hoss by the bridle. Folks say he hung on an' kep' hollerin':

"'I knows you, Dick Hullum; I knows you! You kilt my daddy! Git out o' that buggy, Maggie Belle; git out o' thar!'

"Nobody ain't never heerd Will o' the Woods talk that much befo'. Dick cut him with the whip, but he wouldn't turn loose. Folks got powerful wrathful about the way Dick jerked out his pistol and tried to shoot that loony boy; only reason he didn't kill 'im was Dick's hand shook so bad he couldn't hit nuthin', an' he jes' drapped his pistol in the big road, when his hoss run away. Maggie Belle's packin' her duds right now. Ask Skinny; he *seen* 'er!"

Adrien waited untill Jule's vehemence permitted him to ask:

"Did you find out anything about the box?"

"Ain't so sure, but I reckon he sent that box up-town, either to Frank Cabler's or Adam North's house. Both of 'em is pardners. That gal at Adam North's tells me a lot; keep yo' mouth shet, an' I'll pump her. 'Twouldn't hurt nuthin' ef you was to watch Frank Cabler, an' I'arn to know his ways."

Jule sat long and talked far into the night.

"I'm plumb tuckered out," she finally admitted, and went to her room.

XXVII

MORNING had not yet dawned—the morning of July 4, 1835—and the river lay black and silent beneath the shadow of the bluffs, when a fusillade of shots awakened Adrien.

He flung open his door and looked down

upon the Kangaroo. Lights were still burning in the faro-rooms; the narrow valley seemed to be in flames, and the bayou ran like a stream of blood. His first thought was that the citizens had carried out their threat. The gable of the Kangaroo loomed up like the backbone of some enormous beast, outlined against a glare. It was a bonfire lighting up the hills and glittering across the river, with figures of men and women capering around. Maudlin voices shouted:

"Hurrah, hurrah!"

There were shrill cheers from women, and random pistol-shots.

"Fo'th o' July," whispered Skinny at Adrien's elbow. "Ain't they havin' a good time?"

Jule, tall and tight-lipped, had thrown a shawl about her shoulders and come out on the gallery. Last year she had been the noisiest of those rioters; now she looked down upon it all from her banishment on the hill. Dick Hullum and Maggie Belle were dancing around the fire. Jule's face grew hard. She moved over and touched Adrien's arm.

"Frank Cabler's drunk. See him standing over yonder, all by hisself? Keep an eye on Frank to-day, an' more'n likely you'll find whar your box is at; but don't git into no row. He's mighty spry 'bout shootin' when he gits full."

In spite of Old Shack's orders to lie low, Adrien followed Frank Cabler into the town. Cabler being the youngest and least discreet member of the gang—and drunk, besides—he might point a way to the iron box. After his night of carousal, Cabler walked red-eyed and unsteady, but did not go home—which fact was unimportant in itself, yet it started the cards to running against Old Shack and his gang.

It was the glorious Fourth of July. The militia were mustering for their barbecue; the sidewalks were lined with people, many of whom were ladies. Swinging a cane and twisting his tawny mustache, Cabler swaggered among them, nodding familiarly to men he knew, and staring with studied insolence at citizens whom he recognized, but who denied him the honor of a speaking acquaintance. The tolerant townspeople were in no mood for brawling with desperadoes, their minds being intent upon a speech-making holiday.

Cabler was sober enough to refrain from

insulting ladies when men were near. Once, in an unfrequented street, two young girls came toward him; he stopped in the middle of the sidewalk and forced them to walk around. As they hurried past with lowered eyes, the gambler doffed his hat and made a sweeping bow. Adrien could scarcely keep his hands off the fellow.

"After this, the deluge!" he muttered to himself, knowing that a day of reckoning was not far.

Cabler presently stumbled into the back room of a doggery and sat down to a game of seven-up.

The regular tap, tap of a drum grew louder; a company of the Vicksburg Volunteers wheeled around the corner. Adrien judged them with the eye of an educated soldier, whose technical views had been modified by rough-and-tumble fighting. He had commanded just such men in the Texan army. As one of his long-haired Rangers observed:

"Cap, we don't shoot accordin' to no rules; we jes' sights at a feller *an' hits 'im*. Ain't that the main idee o' shootin'?"

The slouchy Tom Trotter unconsciously drew himself up, proud in the enthusiasm of Captain de Valence's profession; and both of them forgot Frank Cabler. The company passed. Numbers of people were traveling in the same direction—men on horseback, ladies in carriages, all following the route taken by the Volunteers.

Adrien effaced himself against the building, out of the main current. Frank Cabler strode by, with hat set rakishly over his face. The gambler carried his liquor uncommonly well, walking as stiff as a ramrod; the redness of his eyes alone betrayed him.

Adrien followed. Cabler walked as a man with a purpose. He did not turn off.

The Vicksburg Volunteers had stacked their arms at the Cold Spring, just east of the city. When Frank Cabler arrived they were lounging under the trees, until a gray-bearded negro could give the final flourishes to his barbecue. Uncle Hillyard bent over a trench full of glowing hickory coals, like some ancient priest of fire mysteries. It was a mystery; for nobody knew exactly what he put in that wonderful decoction with which to baste the crisp, brown meat.

Frank Cabler walked up the slope, looking right and left, as if daring some one to challenge him. The gambler was not welcome; anybody could see that.

The man called Tom Trotter saw something else, and dodged behind a tree. It was Will o' the Woods, darting from group to group, pointing his finger at various men—"I knows you, I knows *you!*"—the shrill voice rising above every other sound. Tom Trotter could not afford to be unmasked by Will o' the Woods, and he returned to town.

Had Frank Cabler been half as keen at scenting trouble, if he had read the faces of those around him, and sought his own kind at the Kangaroo, Independence Day might have passed in a glory of perspiring orators and barbecued meat; but Cabler had gone to the barbecue in search of trouble.

A blue-eyed soldier-boy stood guard beside the pathway. He glanced at Cabler and smiled; it was a day to smile at everybody. The gambler halted.

"Well, sonny, what you got to say about it?" he inquired.

"Nothing." The lad seemed to be very amiable.

"Ain't goin' to stop me, are you?"

"No—got no orders." The young volunteer kept smiling.

"Well, what would you do ef you had orders?"

"Stop you," he answered promptly.

Cabler passed by him, then wheeled aggressively.

"Now I'm inside. S'posin' the captain was to say put me out?"

"I'd put you out."

"You'd have a wallopin' time!"

Cabler eyed him, with both hands on his hips. Young Fannin declined to argue, and Cabler swaggered on to the barbecue-pit. Captain Brundage was looking down at the trench of red-hot coals, talking with Uncle Hillyard. Cabler thrust himself between them.

"How're you, cap?"

"How are you, Cabler?"

Captain Brundage turned away and continued his conversation with the negro. Cabler moved between them again.

"Cap, one o' yo' little dressed-up monkeys squinted cross-eyed at me, jest like he didn't want to let me in."

"He had no orders to stop anybody." Brundage spoke abruptly.

"Monstrous good thing for him!"

Captain Brundage wheeled and looked straight at the gambler, then said in a very low tone:

"Cabler, nobody asked you here. This is a barbecue for the Vicksburg Volunteers and their *invited guests*. You were not invited. You may remain on the grounds as long as you behave yourself—*no longer*."

Without another glance, the captain proceeded with his instructions to Uncle Hillyard.

XXVIII

WHEN Adrien de Valence turned back from the barbecue grounds, he went straight to the house on the hill. Jule had gone out—Jule spent much of her time in going out. Skinny, who was roaming around the Kangaroo like a lost dog, hurried to meet his friend.

"Now, Skinny, you sit on this step and begin whistling if anybody comes—especially Will o' the Woods."

"Mister, do he scare you, *too?*" with a confidential emphasis on the "too." Adrien nodded, and the boy grinned. "Dick Hullum and Maggie Belle can't hardly stay in their skins when they hears them whistles o' his'n. Makes 'em jes' that narvous. Maggie Belle's goin' away on this evenin's boat to Orleans."

Adrien had already communicated that fact to Pibrac, suggesting that he should keep watch for the woman, although Jule and Skinny assured him that Maggie Belle meant to slip away and carry no trunk.

With the boy on the front steps, Adrien felt safe to read over the translated cipher. Day by day, as he became more familiar with Old Shack's operations, this journal possessed a more consuming interest. His first information had come wholly from the cipher; it was abstract, far-away, unbelievable. He felt toward it much as a schoolboy feels toward some esoteric science which he has never seen applied and proven. Association with the speculators had breathed the breath of life into the record of their deeds, until it pulsed and throbbed and threatened.

Over and over Adrien read it with a clearer understanding. For instance, the word "Kinlock," followed by the names of four men—neither he nor Pibrac had grasped the full significance of such notations. Now it was plain. The Kinlock house had been one of those selected for pillage, and this was the detail to do the job. It would be done on Christmas night, the night of fire, and murder, and plunder.

Whenever Adrien grew heart-sick at his association with these ruffians, whenever his purpose wavered, he need only to think of what might happen on Christmas night. The list of speculators he had practically committed to memory. Fifty, or more, he knew by sight. Every time he heard a name mentioned he looked to see if it were on that list. Buck Flint's name was not there, but neither was Dick Hullum's, nor Shack's. With shrewd discretion, Hullum had kept his own name out of his own journal, and Shack never allowed his to be written.

Adrien spent Saturday afternoon in his room, until a lowering sun had set the river in a blaze and fierce reflections beat against the hill. Nobody stirred about the Kangaroo when a galloping horse crossed the bridge and a voice shouted:

"Bill! Dick! Smith!"

Skinny bounded into the room.

"Trouble's broke loose in Georgy! Yon's Adam North yellin' like a daffy man."

North reined his foaming horse in front of the Kangaroo, waving up at the windows and shouting:

"Dick! Oh, Dick!"

Nobody replying, he dismounted, threw the bridle over a post, and ran inside.

Skinny darted down the hill with Adrien behind him, and entered the back door. Adam North and Old Shack were talking excitedly at the foot of the inner stairs. Wild Bill rushed down pell-mell, Dick Hullum, Smith, Gid Barlow, perhaps others. North was the first whose words Adrien could distinguish.

"They've got Frank Cabler at the court-house, an' say they're going to hang him."

"What's the matter?" Shack demanded.

"Cap'n Brundage treated him bad at the barbecue, and Frank followed him to the court-house to get even. If somebody hadn't knocked up his pistol, Frank would ha' got 'im."

Old Shack's face blazed with wrath.

"I told that fool not to go out to the barbecue."

"Frank is kinder hard-headed," North admitted; "but he warn't hurtin' nobody, jes' pulled one old rooster away from the table, then got up on it and kicked off a few dishes—drinkin' an' havin' a little fun; that's all."

"I've got a notion to let 'im sweat it out."

Old Shack didn't see the humor of Cabler's performance. Wild Bill exploded, however.

"Sweat it out? Thunder! I'm goin' to take a lot o' fellows an' turn 'im loose. Where's all the boys?"

Shack seized him by the arms.

"Don't go nowhere. Gid Barlow, you've got more sense than the rest of 'em. Hurry up there and see if you can't smooth it over."

North shook his head impatiently.

"Cap, we can't smooth it over; sumpin' is boun' to be did, an' *did quick*—or Frank Cabler will be a danglin'. Them fool niggers in Madison County got to talkin' too much. The planters found out, an'—"

"Found out?" Shack gasped. None of his confederates had ever seen their leader flush and then turn yellow as the belly of a rattlesnake. "Found out?" He stumbled, and let himself down in a chair. "You say they've *found out*?"

North spoke on rapidly.

"Yes, they done hung four or five white men and some niggers. Come nigh pullin' up the bush by the roots. Soon as *that* news gits here there won't be no pacifyin' these Vicksburg fools."

Shack raised himself by one hand on the corner of the table and tottered to his feet.

"Who did they hang?"

"Hung Ruel Blake, Josh Cotton, Bill Sanders; goin' to hang Dean and Donovan and a lot more—"

"Did them fellers talk any?"

Shack looked mighty pale around the gills.

"Yes, blabbed everything."

These names were all familiar to Adrien, the men who were hanged being on the speculators' list of trusted friends. Shack reeled and tried to steady himself, bracing his legs like a man when the ground goes slipping beneath him.

"How did they find out?"

"Two nigger girls give the snap away. Mistress heard one of 'em say she hated to kill the white baby she was nursing. Hurry up, cap, we ain't got no time to swap hosses whilst they're fixin' to lynch Frank. I'm goin'!"

"You are *not* going!" Shack thundered. "Gid Barlow, go by yourself—they've got no grudge against you; you can talk to 'em. Promise 'em that Frank will leave town—everybody that they say will leave town."

Promise anything! Bill, you and Adam North and Dick collect our fellows in this house. We've got to hold a confab."

Adrien de Valence was standing near the side door. Nobody paid him the slightest attention. All he had to do was to step backward and get out.

He rushed up to the court-house and found a great crowd assembled, most of the men talking excitedly. A few moved about, whispering a deliberate word to each group, after which they seemed to settle into a fixity of purpose from which there would be no deviation.

A squad of volunteers guarded Frank Cabler, who stood insolently with his hands tied behind him. Dr. Bodley had mounted the court-house steps and was making a speech. The young physician counseled moderation; at the same time he favored taking no chances with a desperado who had tried to assassinate one of their best citizens.

"He came here for that purpose, as shown by the weapons that were taken from him. Cabler had been disarmed at the barbecue ground; yet he had two other pistols and a dirk when he reached the court-house. The law, gentlemen—"

"The law be darned!" somebody interrupted. "We're going to be the law for a spell. Come on, men; lynch him!"

"Wait!" commanded the doctor. "I agree with you, my friend. The written law is inadequate to deal with a case of this kind. We won't hang this ruffian—give him a good start out of town, and keep him going."

"With a brand-new suit o' tar and feathers," another voice added.

This suggestion, with its saving grace of humor, caught the mob, and prevented Cabler's punctual hanging.

Adrien saw Gid Barlow when he shoved himself toward the speaker, and then stopped and looked around him. Dick Hullum and Adam North approached with their accustomed arrogance, halting beneath a clump of trees at the far corner. The mutterings of the mob came to them in a sullen roar. They hesitated and whispered together, looking toward the guard that massed itself around Frank Cabler. Soon they turned discreetly and hurried down the hill in the direction of the Kangaroo.

The Anglo-Saxon impresses his racial love for organization and order even upon

a lynching-bee. All preliminaries were decorously arranged.

First, the committee on tar—young Bill Plunkett knew where he could find a barrel, and was appointed to report instantly at the river-bank.

The committee on feathers—old Alex McGill's wife had a goose-feather bed, and hated those gamblers so cordially as to welcome the honor of furnishing decorations. Alex was designated a committee of one to fetch the feathers, reporting simultaneously with the committee on tar.

The rest of the crowd, three hundred strong, resolved itself into a committee of the whole to exercise a general supervision. The foot of Jackson Street was selected, that being in plain view of the Kangaroo, so as to add to the moral effect.

The sun had sunk beyond the Louisiana woods; a softened glow crowned the hilltops and glistened the river. Skirmishers were deployed to exclude ladies, because of certain awkward necessities attending the change of Cabler's costume. Everybody chatted pleasantly on the line of march—everybody except Cabler, whose part in the performance did not call for words.

When they reached the river-bank a dray came driving lickety-split down the hill with a barrel of tar. Bill Plunkett stood beside it, holding the barrel to keep it from sloshing over. Bill had added a couple of buckets for more convenient distribution of the tar. Old Alex McGill reported promptly with his wife's feather-bed, threw it on the ground, and slit the tick.

The sub-committee on undressing had already done its work. Cabler's skin gleamed white for the fraction of a second, until two buckets of tar were poured over his head and two other buckets dashed fore and aft.

"Now roll yo'self in them feathers!" commanded Alex McGill.

Cabler refused to roll. Enthusiastic arms flung him down and mixed him among the feathers.

"Now, then," remarked Alex McGill, "this rooster don't want to fight no more!"

The self-appointed committee on transportation had procured a cypress log.

"Here, fellows, let's give him a ticket to Orleans. Tie his legs onderneath!"

There was no contentious spirit in that mob; everybody took kindly to every other body's suggestion. This was an excellent way to get rid of Cabler, whom none

of them wanted to kill. They set him comfortably astraddle of his log, with legs well tied beneath, and started him adrift. Every whistle in the harbor tooted as the cypress log went by with its tarred and feathered passenger.

Suddenly every eye shifted from that black speck floating lazily down the river. A horseman rode frantically down the hill, shouting news of a negro insurrection at Livingston, in Madison County, and adding that the planters believed the plot was hatched in Vicksburg.

In that hubbub of whistles few men heard him. Dr. Bodley caught his bridle. The rider leaned over and shouted something into the doctor's ear. The message must have been important; the doctor was greatly excited. He grasped a boy by the shoulder and shoved him up the hill.

"Run, my son," he said; "run and ring the court-house bell; the whole town must hear this news!"

XXIX

NIGHT closed down thickly, with an east wind, a depressing heaviness in the air, and a veil of fog uprising from the river. A sinister illusion lowered above the hill-tops and deepened in the hollows. High up on its commanding summit, the court-house bell clanged out insistent calls for the men of Vicksburg to assemble.

Every street led to the court-house, and carried its outpouring of men, armed and determined. Singly, in pairs, silently by threes and fours they went, irresistibly drawn toward the clangor of that bell.

Unnoticed, the man called Tom Trotter climbed the Grove Street hill. He climbed alone, but there were many others climbing alone. He spoke to no one; others spoke to no one, saving their breath for the hill and for sterner things.

Many a husband came out of his house, leaving the wife to lock the door and wait in silence with the babies. There was no complaining from these women. What must be done must be done, else there could be no safety.

This was on Saturday night, the Fourth of July, a drowsily warm night, when women and children were accustomed to sit upon their galleries. To-night every door was locked, windows down, and shutters tightly closed. No laughing children played from house to house; Vicksburg had penned itself up like a beleaguered city,

filled with the mutter of low voices and the tramp of marching feet.

All the feet and all the voices passed in one direction, obeying the summons of the bell—except the patrols in squads of four. These men were assigned to guard the town while the citizens left their houses unprotected. Details of volunteers marched back and forth, halting strangers and inquiring of their affairs. At the head of one squad strode Will o' the Woods, piping like an inspired madman to lash the people into frenzy. Men stepped more quickly as they heard, and grasped their weapons tighter.

There was no light in Worthington's office, but Adrien knew where to find the key and to put his hand upon Cecile's letter. Diagonally across the street the light streamed from the windows of a drug-store. Colored globes sent their shafts of red and green into the darkness. There was nothing suspicious in a man standing upon the public streets reading a letter; other men passed; a patrol went by without molesting him. Adrien forgot them all.

Cecile's letter spoke only of the merry times that they were having. It was full of lovers' personalities and injunctions to be prudent. Adrien lifted his head.

"This is Saturday night," he thought. "Flint was shot Thursday night. No, she hadn't heard of that when she wrote this letter."

But she *had* met Buck Flint in the pine thicket, and Adrien knew it. He stared before him, then shook his head stubbornly and refused to think.

"I may be a fool!" he muttered, but kept on shaking his head.

Absorbed in his own thoughts, Adrien had failed to notice a figure at the other window—a man whose face showed ghastly green in the light of that colored globe. It was Old Shack. What could he be doing, standing so still? Adrien thought little and cared less. It was queer of Old Shack, and risky. His business must be important—but it was Shack's business.

Adrien had started to move away when a woman's voice within the drug-store caused him to look up and smile. Everything reminded him of Cecile. As a matter of curiosity he glanced through the window. Yes, a woman was there, a veiled woman, half hidden by the prescription case. The druggist was placing a bottle in her hand and explaining how to use it.

"Thank you, sir," again came the voice. Adrien stood rigid. It was Cecile—Cecile in Vicksburg! She had come to Buck Flint. Hot blood rushed into his face.

Cecile hurried out of the drug-store and paused an instant on the threshold. Adrien lurked in shadow. The red light dazzled her eyes; she could not see him. Despite her dread of venturing upon the street alone, she drew her veil and plunged into the darkness. He watched her flit like a moth across the glow of the green light and start up the hill.

She passed the spot where Old Shack had been standing, and for the first time Adrien noted that the gray man was gone. Whither or why Old Shack had gone he cared not. Nothing mattered except Cecile, and Cecile was here.

Adrien feared to call out, lest she might recognize his voice and speak his name. There were too many people within hearing. He followed, with mind and eye fastened upon that swiftly moving figure, which turned neither right nor left. Many other men were on the street, all going the same way; Cecile overtook and passed them; otherwise Adrien would never have observed their presence.

No, he wasn't spying upon Cecile—of that he would have been ashamed. He only waited until she reached a safe place to make himself known, to guard and protect her. If she wanted to tell of her affairs in Vicksburg he would listen. A malignant spirit within his mind kept whispering:

"You're a fool!"

Fool or no fool, Adrien persistently blinded himself; he saw only the flutter of a skirt which hesitated at the corner. Cecile was frightened; she stood close against the fence, so that three men with rifles might pass on toward the court-house.

Beyond the corner four other men were approaching, also with rifles, walking two by two. Adrien could not see these men. There were soldiers moving south on Monroe Street, immediately to the west of the court-house.

The sergeant's lantern flickered along the ground. Cecile turned north, and the squad stood out of her way. Ahead was the dark street, utterly strange and deserted. With all her courage, Cecile was only a young girl who had never been out of the house alone after nightfall. The court-house bell kept clanging at intervals like

the boom of an alarm-gun. In all directions she heard the footsteps of armed men. She hurried on, almost running.

When Cecile disappeared Adrien quickened his pace and turned the corner briskly, bumping into the squad of volunteers. He tried to disengage himself; two men grasped his shoulders.

"Wait a minute, sport; where you headin' for?"

Adrien did not answer; he struggled to get free.

"Let me go; I'm in a hurry!"

"Twon't take long to stay a little while." Cecile moved rapidly. The street was dark; he could barely see her. "See here, young feller, quit that wigglin'! Who are you, and what's your business?"

"My name's Trotter—let me go!"

"Not so fast there! Where are you going to?"

"Goin' home to get my gun—goin' to the meetin'."

"Needn't be in such an all-fired rush; that meetin' ain't goin' to run away." Adrien had scarcely glanced at the men; he was straining his eyes after Cecile. "No use kickin', pardner. You got to tell us where you live."

"On the hill yonder."

"Bad neighborhood! What do you feller for a livin'?"

"Timber-man."

The sergeant held up his lantern to Adrien's face.

"Do you fellers know him?"

"No; he ain't one o' them sharps at the Kangaroo—and our orders is to 'rest them. Sport, you don't hang around the Kangaroo, do you?"

"No."

Adrien became more tractable; Cecile was entirely out of sight.

"Keerect; you don't look like no gambler to me."

"Turn him loose, boys—reckon he's all right."

"Jes' as you say, cap."

Adrien did not break into a run until the squad had disappeared around the corner; then he darted forward like a spurred horse. He ran this way and that, circling as a hound circles to pick up a trail. At every cross street he stopped and listened for a gate to slam, for a door to open—for anything which might tell him where Cecile had gone. He shouted aloud; the night answered him with a mocking echo

from the side of Fort Hill. Cecile had vanished.

Adrien had scarcely been aware of climbing the Jackson Street hill and reaching the red-brick court-house. A bonfire burned in front, lighting up grim figures and glinting from the rifles on which they leaned. Stern-eyed men listened in silence while Dr. Bodley, from the steps, told them of the negro insurrection which had been detected in the neighboring county of Madison, instigated, as was believed, by some of the outlaws with whom this meeting had to deal.

Adrien moved closer to hear details of what he supposed was a premature outbreak of Old Shack's plot. Some one touched his elbow and whispered:

"Come on, pardner." It was Tite Higgins, looking very serious. "I been searchin' everywhar; 'lowed you mought be hereabouts. Cap wants you right away. Thar's plenty of our fellers here to tote the news."

Tite sauntered carelessly away from the crowd, slid down the gullied hillside, and gained the street.

"Hurry 'long, Trotter," he urged. "Them fellers is goin' to give us twenty-four hours' notice to leave town. They means it this time, but our folks is got hard-headed and won't believe 'em. Somebody's chickens is sholy goin' to squall!"

XXX

EVERY light was flaring defiantly when Tite Higgins and the man called Trotter got back to the Kangaroo. The garish room was crowded, but not with lambs. Hawks and vultures, wolves and jackals went about smiling with beaks and fangs, as if, their prey being all consumed, they were making ready to feed upon one another.

The games ran on noisily, yet there were few, if any, players from the outside. Timid venturers kept away, fluttered by the rumor that the Kangaroo was to be raided and burned. No lambs coming to be shorn, the shearers made hilarious and fictitious sport of betting among themselves. Dealers loudly called the turns, in voices far different from their customary drone.

This boisterous laughing and gibing among the gamblers betrayed an excitement which the fall of a card or the settling down of a ball never called forth. They were acting a part, they were making a bluff, while they watched the door and started at any unusual sound.

Adrien de Valence felt the supercharged atmosphere as he strode in with Tite Higgins. Gamblers turned their heads to look, forgetful of faro and roulette.

"Who's that?" a sportsman asked.

"Oh, he's all right," another speculator responded.

Though the games themselves were a shallow pretense, the presence of two hundred gamblers was desperately real. This was a fact; and the rifles against the wall were facts—tangible facts, loaded to kill. No merry make-believe about them. Every sportsman—as these gentlemen of pleasure called themselves—wore his pistols, more frequently three than two. Bowie-knives were not so prominently displayed, but quite as ready to their hands.

Higgins did not pause; he stalked across the room and up the stairway, where many another messenger had come and gone, bearing news from the public meeting to Old Shack.

Shackleford Orr made it a rule never to show himself in company with men who were marked by the community. He always kept in the background and avoided prominence. Even in the present state of public excitement the outlaw chief could have remained in Vicksburg unchallenged. Not a citizen knew him by sight. Being a man of fine appearance and pleasing address, always provided with means of identification, he could stop at the best hotel and pass as a Virginia planter seeking new lands upon which to settle with his slaves.

Tite Higgins led Adrien straight to the same room where he had first been taken. They found the gray outlaw surrounded by the same men and by several others whom Adrien had never seen. These were newcomers, and evidently on pressing business.

Old Shack glanced up inquiringly.

"Well?"

"Folks is gittin' pretty hot at the meetin'," Tite blurted out. "Dr. Bodley has been a talkin' about them fools in Madison County."

Shack tossed his head angrily.

"Are they goin' to do anything to-night, do you think?"

"No, jes' give us twenty-four hours' notice to leave town. Same old bluff! Don't amount to shucks."

"I'm some weary o' this tomfoolery," Wild Bill remarked. "Makes me peevish, gittin' a notice every Sunday."

Dick Hullum got up from his chair.

"I'm for puttin' a stop to it—it busts up business. Th' ain't ten players down-stairs, an' won't be none till things quiet down."

Bill strode over and took his position beside Hullum.

"You spoke it, pardner; and besides that, I'm itchin' to play even for the way they done Frank Cabler. That boy's true blue, an' when he gits back he'll make 'em toe the mark. Let's march up-town an' make them fellers quit meddlin' with us. We can put two hundred and fifty men across that bridge in ten minutes."

Shack brought his heavy fist down upon the table.

"You fellers talk like a pair o' fools. Don't you never larn nuthin'? This ain't no flurry; this is a storm, an' you've got to duck yo' heads or git yo' necks broke. Clear out, all of you, especially you, Dick Hullum—an' you, an' you"—Shack's fingers told them off like cattle as he called their names—"Wild Bill, Smith, McCall, Adam North. Go tell Corrigan an' Crane an' Hord an'—" The leader mentioned twenty men who were like red rags to the bulls of Vicksburg.

"I'm not goin'!" Dick Hullum doggedly asserted. "We can whip them psalm-singers from the p'int of a dagger to the anchor of a ship."

"True enough," Shack assented. "We've got plenty men to burn the town and make good sport of it. But"—he added with slow emphasis and suggestiveness, his finger moving as if it were underscoring his words—"but suppose we do clean 'em out, what becomes of the *big thing*? Vicksburg ain't a drop in the bucket. If we pull out o' here quiet that allows 'em five months to forget this Madison County hubbub. *Five months!*"

Adrien understood and the others understood. It was just five months until Christmas. Old Shack, with far-sighted wisdom, meant to abandon the Kangaroo and offer no resistance. The speculators would gain nothing by making a fight, except to put the entire South upon its guard. Other towns could send men to help the citizens of Vicksburg—which could not be done later on, if every community were threatened at once by a general insurrection.

Sentell—Adrien had discovered his name, and learned that he had come all the way from Arkansas—Sentell nodded.

"Right you are, cap; you've got a long head. If they can't find nobody to fight

with there won't be no fight. No fight, no talk. Talk's the thing we can't stand—not right now. After a while they'll have plenty to jabber about and then we'll be gone."

"But I've got property here," Hullum objected.

"Me, too," insisted North. "Mine's right in town."

Shack clenched his hand determinedly.

"A few hundred dollars—what does that amount to when millions are at stake? Let it go for a few months, then come back and get a thousand for one."

"I'm not goin' to run," Hullum repeated, unconvinced.

"Me, neither." Adam North took his stand beside Hullum and Bill. "Here's where I plant my foot!"

Old Shack displayed those qualities of leadership upon which the speculators had come to rely. He felt like striking the three rebels dead at his feet. His soul raged; yet he rose and spoke deliberately.

"I'm plannin' for the best, an' *that's what's goin' to be done*. Higgins, you an' Tom Trotter go down-stairs an' pass the word. No, Trotter, stay here; you don't know the men well enough. Higgins, go tell our fellers to skin out from here during the night. Tell 'em to act like they're scared, so that everybody'll stampede. Scatter every which way; travel different directions, an' don't let me hear of a missin' hoss, or a mistake about somebody else's money. Them's orders—pass 'em along!"

Adrien stood aside while Higgins hurried through the door. Old Shack turned.

"Dick Hullum, you an' Bill an' Adam North now listen to me. I ain't much older than you, but I've had a sight more experience. It pays to be shifty in a new country. You won't foller my orders, an' I reckon you won't foller my advice, neither, which is this—I advises you to be the first three sports to light out o' here an' eat up jes' as much road as you kin. Sure as you try to stay somethin's boun' to happen—somethin' mighty onpleasant; an' it's goin' to happen to you. I can help you now. I can't help nobody if you stay—an' *I won't!*"

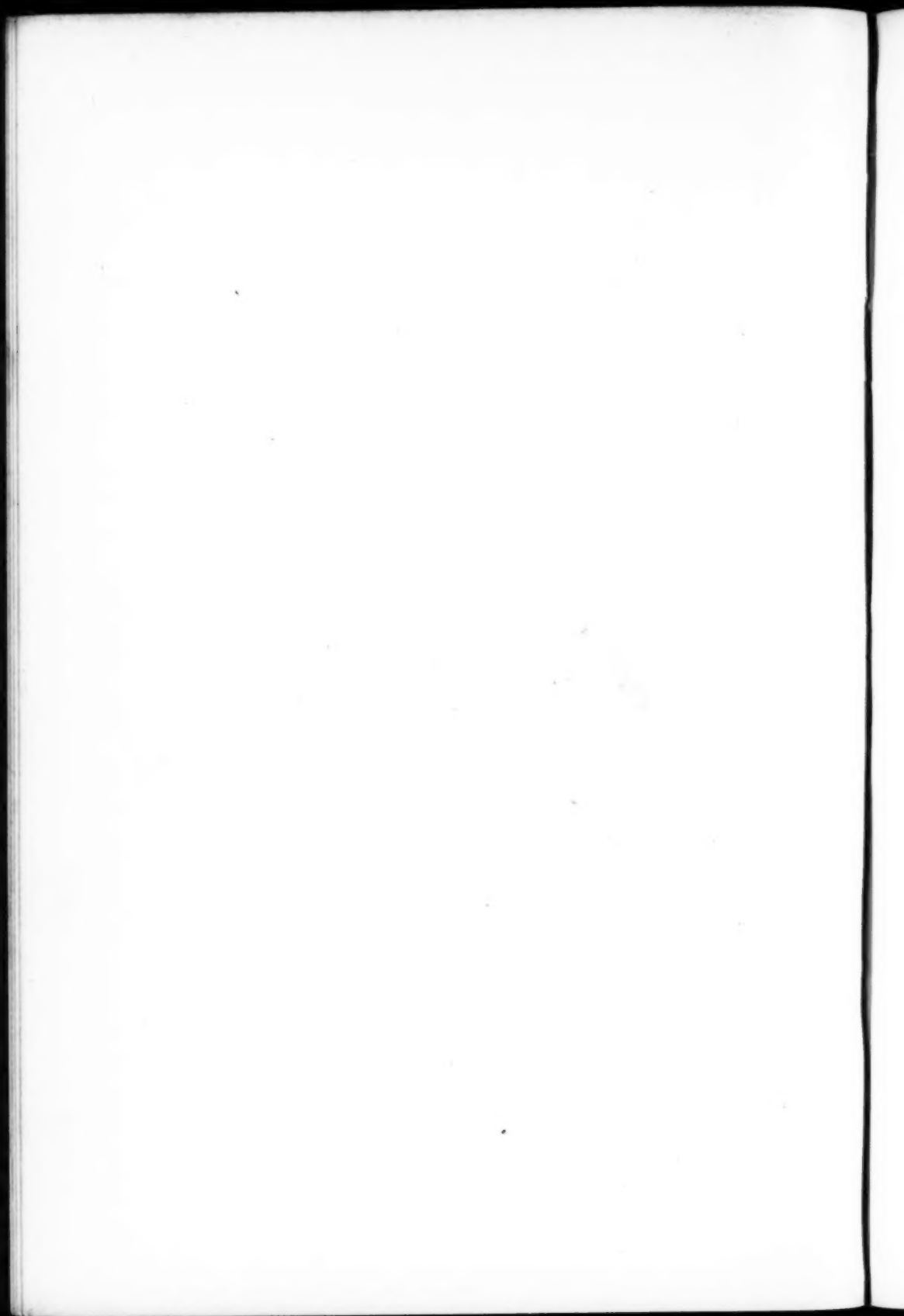
The three men glanced at one another and stood firm. Old Shack went on:

"When you quit obeyin' my orders that's where we part company. Le's part friends. Here's my hand on it." Old Shack would have preferred to choke them. "Don't fool yourselves, boys; there's goin' to be rough



CECILE PICKED UP HER WHIP, STEPPED UPON THE GALLERY, AND MET HER FATHER

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work in this town, with nobody standin' behind you. Go down-stairs an' you'll find most o' the speculators gone."

XXXI

SUNDAY, July 5, 1835, a broiling mid-summer day—a day when madness sizzled in the sunshine and men clung to every strip of shade. A sinister stillness brooded over the little town, which nestled in swaddling-clothes amid the cradling hills.

From his upper window in the Kangaroo Old Shack gazed over the roof-tops and the ravines. Alone he sat, receiving now and again the messages which told him that his orders had been carried out. Through the previous evening, night, and early morning, gamblers had departed in every direction; their clattering hoofs crossed every bridge. Singly and in couples they traveled by every road. Steamboats, down-stream and up-stream, all carried their quota of fleeing sportsmen.

Not all belonged to Shack's gang, but he guessed aright. His men were the dominating spirits, and their flight precipitated a general panic, like loose stones toppling from the edge of an avalanche.

Shack sent away the marked men, those who had swaggered and bullied about town until their very presence became a festering insult; but he was keeping behind many an unsuspected adherent, some of whom were taking active part with the vigilance committee. From these men he received hourly reports of what went on. He smiled cunningly at the occasional squad which patrolled the streets, or at the tattoo of hoofs as some belated gambler spurred away.

Shack never overlooked a detail. He sent for Adrien.

"Trotter, you needn't go down to Simon Welter's; I want you here. Nobody knows you, an' we've got a bit o' work for you an' me together."

There was one factor, however, upon which Old Shack had not counted. His widely disseminated clan, with thousands of followers, was founded upon the restlessness and turbulence of humankind. By the same element it fell.

There were reckless spirits among the speculators, who would fight desperately, take long chances, and ride hard, but who could never stand hitched to a quiet play and a patient game. These men Shack employed in running off negroes, stealing horses, and robbing travelers. He kept them

in ignorance of his ultimate ambitions, they being as headlong with their tongues as with their weapons.

Wild Bill, for instance, had fertility of resource, a marvelous amount of dash, and a bulldog courage. Bill was interested with Dick Hullum and Adam North in the private gambling-joint which North conducted on Jackson Street, near Washington. The place was a veritable mint, made so by the nimble fingers of Smith and McCall. Here flocked the richer and more aristocratic pigeons, who preferred that their plucking should not be conducted in public. None of his patrons could afford to squeal or brawl, and the citizens in general knew little of his enterprise.

This was why North cherished a delusion that he could continue to run, even though the Kangaroo were destroyed. He had converted his house into an arsenal, armed, provisioned, and liquored to stand a siege. Old Shack knew these facts and considered them while gazing from his window.

The guard entered and laid a printed paper before him.

"Simpson fetched this; he says they are posted up all over town. Dr. Bodley come down here, all by hisself, an' tacked one on our door."

"Gritty devil!" Old Shack muttered, as he read:

Resolved, that a notice be given to all professional gamblers that the citizens of Vicksburg are resolved to exclude them from this place and vicinity; and that twenty-four hours' notice be given them to leave the place.

Resolved, that all persons permitting faro-dealing in their houses will be prosecuted therefor.

Resolved, that one hundred copies of the foregoing resolutions be printed and stuck up at the corners of the streets, and that this publication be deemed due notice.

For Shack, personally, twenty-four minutes' notice would have been ample. His horse was ready saddled on the hill. Ten miles away, at the Yazoo River, a skiff waited, and, on the farther side another horse. A few nights of hard riding would land him safely in Tennessee.

But Shack's avarice held him for that additional and perilous day. He had thirty thousand dollars in gold, with other valuables. He could not take this with him, and in such matters Shack trusted nobody.

All day long the gray outlaw sat at his

window, watching and hoping that nothing would break the quiet of that glaring Sabbath. Vicksburg was ominously still. Armed men went silently about without molesting the few gamblers who were completing their preparations for departure.

Before eight o'clock on Monday morning Old Shack took his position at the window, like a sly old spider crouching in the center of his web, keeping in touch with all those sensitive filaments which ramified through the community and responded to the slightest tremor of disturbance.

Suddenly the streets waked up, like the rousing of an ant-heap. Squads of volunteers marched double-quick. Men shouted to one another, and hurried from all directions with weapons in their hands. Stragglers ran together, merging into companies like drops of water into a torrent. Something had happened.

There went Will o' the Woods, tossed upon the crest of the turmoil, coat-tails flapping against his thin, bare legs. Shack could almost hear the sound of Will's mad piping, weird and harrowing, as he heard it in his dreams. The sturdy outlaw stood up, trembling.

"I oughter kilt that boy long ago!"

Somebody came running along the hall. Shack rushed to the door.

"What's the matter?"

The man was desperately excited.

"Things is broke loose up-town, cap; I'm gittin' out o' here!"

"What is it?" Shack caught him by the arm and shook him. "Spit it out, fool!"

"Wild Bill stirred 'em up; he tore down a lot o' them notices. Knocked one old codger in the head with his pistol. Can't stay no longer, cap; I'm skinnin' out."

"Git!" Old Shack gave him a push. "You, too, git quick"—to the other guard. "Ef you see anything in this house you want, jes' take it along."

"Don't want nuthin' 'cept a hoss!"

Both men dashed toward the staircase. Shack turned to the window, and for a few minutes stood looking upon the town. He had meant to wait for night, secrete his money, and escape to Tennessee. He must go now.

A wagon passed along the street, piled up with faro-tables and roulette-wheels. Old Shack closed his lips grimly.

"I knowed they meant business this time!"

A sudden smoke arose—possibly some gambler's house. The Vigilantes were making a clean sweep. Before turning from the window the outlaw shook his fist.

"Good-by, Vicksburg! I'm comin' back, an' then there'll be a smoke!"

Shack rarely said more than he meant. His eyes blazed with hatred. He glanced about the room, strapped on his pistols, took up his saddle-bags, and hurried out. His lone figure climbed the hillside.

Jule was standing on her gallery.

"Yon's a fire, cap." She pointed. "Wonder ef them fellers is startin' to burn the town!"

"I reckon not," Shack answered. "Where's Tom Trotter?"

"He's gone todes the cote-house 'bout a hour ago."

"Why did he go away? I ordered him to stay here," Shack muttered to himself; then to Jule: "Tell Trotter I want to see him at once. I—" Shack hesitated; something in Jule's manner warned him against talking too freely. "When will Trotter come back?"

"Dunno, cap. All his things is here—he ain't took nuthin'."

"Jes' say I want to see him. That's enough."

The gray man passed on. Jule pretended to be watching the smoke, but she never lost a motion of Old Shack's. Presently he disappeared in a hollow, where she knew his horse had been standing, ready saddled, for the past two days. Jule nodded to herself when he mounted, climbed cautiously to the summit, and went northward along the ridge road. She smiled evilly, her eyes snapping with hate.

"I ain't got to let 'im git away 'thout tellin' Mr. Trotter about it!"

Her shrewd guess that the man known as Trotter was spying upon the outlaw chief would have disquieted Adrien de Valence. "I got to find Mr. Trotter somehow or 'nother."

Throwing a shawl over her head, Jule darted down a hidden path, crossed the bayou, and kept along the west side of Cherry Street, where Old Shack could not see her. Then she ran at her best speed toward the court-house.

XXXII

ADRIEN DE VALENCE spent that long-remembered Sunday in Lynn Worthington's office. He had the place to himself,

sitting at a window and watching the drug-store diagonally across the street. He half hoped, but more than feared, that Cecile might come. He could ask no questions, could only watch and wait.

A letter to Pibrac occupied the weary hours. Adrien realized that his own life might be snuffed out by a single act of indiscretion, in which event Pibrac would have ample information to prevent the calamity at Christmas.

Lynn hurried in to get a rifle, and hurried out again, stopping only to say:

"We are going to raid the gambling-houses to-morrow. That might be a good chance to find your box. Come along anyhow, and see a lot of fun."

Adrien dreaded that this might also be a good chance to find Cecile, which accounted for the fact that he was out by daylight on Monday morning, waiting for Lynn Worthington's squad of raiders. They went methodically about their business, first surrounding the house of a gambler named Sid Crane.

The door was locked. Lynn burst it open, called two volunteers to help him search, and beckoned Adrien to follow. With a distinct sense of relief Adrien found no human being in the house, nor did he find the box. A dozen willing hands brought out the roulette-table, faro layouts, boxes of ivory chips, all the tools of the gambler's trade, and loaded them on a dray. It was this first load which Old Shack saw when it was being escorted to the market-house square.

Details of volunteers kept back the citizens, who were anxious to help, but exhibited none of the uncontrollable mob spirit. They were doing things decently and in order.

From house to house the raiders passed, sometimes making a fruitless search, sometimes gathering a dray-load of contraband, all of which was carted to the open space on Monroe Street. Most of the gamblers' houses were abandoned, their scattered plunder bearing testimony to a hurried flight. Other raiders were at work in different parts of the town. Adrien listened eagerly to bits of news that flashed from group to group, dreading to hear that Cecile had been discovered at Buck Flint's.

Once, when he had pressed forward into the back room of Little Ike's house, he was startled by Will o' the Woods, who darted in and stood staring at him in the

half-light. It was only for an instant; then Will wheeled and rushed out again. The idiot was not playing on his pipes or singing and laughing. There was a different expression upon his face; Will was searching for somebody in deadly earnest.

"Well, that's about the last place," remarked Worthington. "Sergeant, send all that plunder to the market-house."

"Cap," protested the spokesman for a sullen group armed with shotguns, who had assisted in the search of every house; "Cap, we ain't foun' Wild Bill. He hit my daddy with a pistol, and we ain't aimin' to quit till we do git 'im. Can't we jes' keep on lookin'?"

"Yes, but the understanding is that none of these men are to be hurt. The committee will deal with them."

"That's all right, cap; I reckon we won't have no complaint 'bout what the committee does to Wild Bill."

"No, I reckon not," Lynn answered, with a smile.

Three dray-loads of gambling contrivances went rattling down the street. These would top off the funeral pile. Every male creature in town and many women had gathered to witness the cremation. Women thrust out their heads from nearby widows, curiously regarding the mysterious stuff, of which they had heard so much, but which they had never seen—faro tables and layouts, richly inlaid boxes, pasteboard boxes full of ivory chips, roulette-wheels spangled with mirrors and mother-of-pearl, all stacked up indiscriminately with plenty of light-wood knots and tar to make it burn.

The citizens had planned a solemn function, with several orators to point the moral and adorn the tale. Judge Bullock had already begun with "Fellow citizens," when Will o' the Woods gave the proceeding a dramatic climax which was not on the program. Without warning, the idiot came rushing through the crowd, waving a blazing torch, like some fire-eyed and maddened messenger of Highland war. Before anybody could stop him—which nobody thought of doing—Will had broken the circle of volunteers and thrust his brand beneath the pile. He laughed shrilly at the thick, brown smoke, the roaring blaze, and crackle which instantly arose.

The thing was done, well done, completely done. The people could only stand and stare.

"Lynn," whispered Judge Bullock, "haven't you overlooked Adam North?"

"That's so; I forgot him. Attention—fall in!"

Adrien caught the name "Adam North." He recalled that Jule had thought North likely to have the box.

This falling in of the soldiers caused another stir among the people, who had grown weary of watching the fire. Something else was to be done, and, like a Roman rabble, they pressed on, eager for new sensations.

Worthington and his squad moved toward the corner of Jackson Street; a few stragglers followed to see what was going to happen.

"Hold on a minute," Judge Bullock called out, interrupting his conference with Dr. Bodley and General William Vick. The three came up and took Lynn aside. Dr. Bodley spoke.

"Lynn, you'd better take your whole company. We have just learned that Adam North has barricaded his house and swears that he won't permit us to search it. Dick Hullum and Wild Bill are with him—perhaps others."

"We've got plenty of men to root 'em out."

"Be on the safe side," Judge Bullock urged. "Take a force sufficient to overwhelm them. If you have only a few men they might resist."

Worthington had worried through a tame morning; it was not like man-hunting, but more like dragging rabbits out of a hollow. A touch of spirited resistance would set his blood in motion. Dr. Bodley and General Vick insisted so earnestly, however, that Lynn marched westward down the slope of Jackson Street with fifty men in ranks and twice as many in the crowd that followed.

Adam North's house was near the foot of Jackson Street, on the steepest slope of the hill, just above Washington. At the west side, the lower side, it was two stories high; but owing to the slant of the hill it was only one story on the east side, where a small platform extended to the sidewalk. Flimsily constructed, the house was a mere shell, a shanty, worth far less than the value of many a bet that passed within its walls.

Five men sat at a table in the second room with half-empty glasses and a bottle. Wild Bill unsteadily poured another drink.

"Better let up on that lick," the timid little McCall suggested.

"Tain't no business o' yours," Bill grumbled, and the whisky gurgled down.

Smith said nothing. Smith rarely said anything; he made a living by his nimble fingers and his prudent tongue. Dick Hullum rose from the table and stooped to pat his dog, which was tied to a leg of the sideboard.

"Good old Deuce! Mighty tough, ain't it?"

Deuce looked up with big, intelligent eyes, as if regretting the awkward circumstances which forced his master to keep him tied. Hullum passed into the front room.

"All right, Adam; I'll keep watch for a while."

North resigned his seat at the window. Hullum rested his elbows on the sill and applied his eyes to the slit beneath the shade. North slipped noiselessly into the back room and poured a glass of the raw stuff. As he drank he glanced at the other men and took up the bottle.

"What are you fixin' to do with that whisky?" Bill demanded.

"Lock her up; everybody's had enough."

"Gimme another!"

"No more, Bill; we've got to keep cool."

"That's no way to treat a friend—shut him up here in jail and cut off his lick!"

"You've had a plenty; you got too much this morning and stirred up this hornet's nest."

In spite of Bill's continued protests, North locked up the bottle. Bill moved toward the window.

"See anybody, Dick?"

"Not yit."

"They ain't comin', bet you a hundred dollars!"

"Done!" Hullum answered. "Hope you win."

The long and apathetic silence of the streets encouraged Hullum, who had expected an assault in force immediately after Wild Bill stumbled in that morning, boasting that he had "torn down them durned notices and busted one old codger over the head for meddling." That was when they barricaded the doors and laid out their weapons; but hours had gone by, each man taking his turn at the window, and nobody had come to molest them.

"Dick, here's where I win a hundred."

Bill strode into the back room. McCall slunk to Hullum's side and whispered.

"Nobody comin', Dick?"

Dick shook his head, and McCall slipped back to the table. Bill paced the narrow room, looking now and again to the table where their pistols were ranged for instant use.

"By the jumpin' Jerusalem! I don't like bein' penned up; I likes to fight in the open!"

McCall and Smith shriveled in their chairs, wishing they had never followed Hullum into such a deadfall. Smith's arm hung limp across the table. McCall timorously fingered an empty glass. At a sound from the street both men lifted their heads and listened, looking to Hullum for the first alarm.

"Tain't nobody comin' here. I kin lick the whole caboodle with one hand tied behind me," said Bill, stopping in the middle of the floor.

Smith never lifted his evasive eyes.

"I ain't so sure, Bill. They busted into Sid Crane's house an' took everything, an' Elmore Williams's, an' Big Charley's, an'—"

"Twarn't nobody in none o' them places." Bill squared himself, with legs apart.

"Big Charley was to home; they got him."

"Big Charley don't 'mount to that!" Wild Bill snapped his fingers. "They ain't comin' here; they ain't goin' no place where real men is at. We'll fill 'em so full o' lead their hides wouldn't hold shucks!"

Smith and McCall sprang up, jostling the table. Wild Bill stiffened where he stood.

"Look!" Hullum exclaimed in a whisper, pointing with his slender finger. "Look! The whole town's comin'!" North dropped on his knees beside the window and said not a word. Hullum's eyes gleamed, his lips curled back, his teeth showed. His long fingers coiled and uncoiled, then grew steady. "There's young Worthington, and General Vick, and Dr. Bodley!"

"What are you going to do?" Adam North inquired.

The others looked to Hullum. Hullum did not answer. He saw the oncoming volunteers divide, surrounding the house and lining the streets. To the rear, toward the bayou, a network of gullies still

offered an open but precarious retreat; but Hullum refused to consider a retreat, and turned to the front door. North waited for an answer to his question.

Hullum listened to the peremptory step of three men who mounted the platform and rapped on the door. Worthington's voice demanded: "Open! Open!"

Nobody replied—which had been the case at many another house. Dick Hullum set his teeth tighter, then answered Adam North by taking up a shotgun. Coolly he fronted the door, not three paces away. Without a word, Wild Bill stood beside him and leveled his weapon; Adam North, Smith and McCall stationed themselves behind the table—five silent men in semidarkness, their glittering eyes fastened upon the door.

Worthington knocked again.

"Open this door!"

Listening intently, all five of them heard another sound which penetrated the thin walls—a high-pitched cry of neither man nor beast. Bill nudged Hullum.

"That's Will o' the Woods; hear 'im, Dick?"

Dick Hullum turned involuntarily and glanced through the back window. When he faced the door again his hands were trembling.

"There's nobody in here." It was General Vick's voice.

"Henry Anderson saw them at the window not ten minutes ago." That was Dr. Bodley speaking. "I'll break in the door and be done with it!"

"Careful, doctor!"

Not a word, not a sound, came from those men within; they stood with leveled weapons.

Dr. Bodley kicked the door, and tried it with his shoulders. The door gave a little, but didn't break, Bodley being a man of slight physique. The powerful General Vick pulled him aside.

"Let me try."

Vick threw his mighty weight against the door; it fell inward with a crash, the general falling over it. Bodley sprang forward. Vick's fall saved his life, a load of buckshot passing over him and striking Dr. Bodley full in the breast.

Bodley dropped limp. The crowd ceased buzzing and stood dazed. Worthington rushed through the door with twenty men behind, firing as they went. They found the wretched Smith and McCall cowered

in a corner, pleading for their miserable lives. Dick Hullum, Adam North, and Wild Bill had dropped through the window into a maze of ravines which led toward the bayou and the Kangaroo.

Worthington darted to the front again and shouted:

"Here! You men with horses! Ride this way—that way. Go to the top of the hill. They are in those gullies; don't let 'em get away!"

A dozen horsemen separated and dashed off along the roads which flanked the ravines.

Through the smoke of the first shots Adrien de Valence rushed into the house. Men with axes broke in every closet, opened the sideboard, the wardrobes, looked everywhere. Smith and McCall were under guard in the rear room, while the leaders hurriedly conferred. Something must be done with the prisoners, and done quickly, before the crowd realized that Dr. Bodley had been killed.

Adrien noticed Dick Hullum's dog tugging at his tether and trying to leap through the window.

"Lynn," he whispered; "Dick Hullum was in this house; here's his dog."

"We thought so."

"That dog don't never get six feet away from Dick Hullum," somebody suggested. "He'll shore lead you to him."

"Good; try it!"

Leading the dog by a long rope, four horsemen hurried away by the river road in the direction that Dick Hullum was supposed to have fled.

Everything happened in a whirl; only those who were nearest knew what had occurred. Powerful hands wrenched the door from its hinges and laid the physician's body upon it. Four men bore the corpse into the street.

"Who is that?" a voice from the mob demanded.

"Dr. Hugh Bodley."

"Is he dead?"

"Stone dead."

"Dr. Bodley has been murdered by the gamblers!"

The cry reechoed through the town, shouted at every corner, caught up by frenzied voices in the street, answered by pale-faced women from their windows.

"Watch yourself, Vally," Worthington whispered. "We are in for trouble."

A frantic crowd surged around the house

of Adam North, clamoring for instant vengeance. High above their uproar, Worthington called out:

"Fall in, volunteers! Stand ready! Let nobody enter."

Fifty militiamen with clubbed muskets beat back the maddened people. Smith and McCall had been securely bound and thrown into a corner. Their faces were pallid, their pulses scarcely beat. They could see the line of soldiers bending and wavering under pressure of the mob.

Officers pleaded with the people to be patient and justice would be meted out. Every street poured in its stream of men, adding to the weight of the mob who were shoving back the soldiers.

"Burn the house! Hang 'em! Hang 'em!" came in a hoarse bellow from the multitude.

Captain Brundage arrived with a reenforcement of twenty-five volunteers. Judge Bullock stepped on the platform and lifted his hand.

"Men of Vicksburg, why stand ye idle? Is there no work to do? Adam North, Wild Bill, and Dick Hullum have escaped from this house. Go find them! Watch every road; search every suspected building. Don't stand here like children. Go! *do* something!"

The mob broke by twos and threes and dozens; they swarmed across the rugged country toward the bayou. Many were experienced frontiersmen; they knew how the land lay, and placed guards at every point through which the gamblers might escape. Horsemen raced along the roads. Men on foot crept among the ravines and beat the bushes. A rabbit could scarcely have escaped that net.

The street cleared.

"Now, Lynn, get your prisoners to jail, quick!"

Smith and McCall were tossed upon a dray and rushed up the hill, with a hundred volunteers escorting them. Captain Brundage breathed easier when the key of safety turned upon his prisoners. At the jail door a hatless boy galloped up and yelled:

"They've ketched Adam North and Wild Bill—ketched bofe of 'em!"

"Now we'll get Dick Hullum," every man muttered to himself, and to his neighbor.

"Catch Dick Hullum! Catch Dick Hullum!" Nobody thought of anything

else and nobody said anything else. The cry passed from mouth to mouth.

XXXIII

WHEN the uproar quieted at Adam North's, De Valence searched every closet and receptacle that might contain the iron box, and came out disappointed. Jule ran to the edge of the platform. There was no mistaking Jule, even with that checkered shawl which concealed her face. She whispered excitedly:

"I been lookin' for you all over. Shack is got yo' box up yonder"—pointing toward the northeastern part of the city. "He's on that hill right now, watching his chance to get his plunder together. Shack's fixin' to light out."

"Where is the box?"

Jule beckoned him to follow at a distance.

"Come along, I'll p'int you fer as I dare. I dassen't stay here. These folks is goin' to clean out the Kangaroo, women and all. Our men folks is gone."

Jule hurried him along the street, talking incoherently, and drawing back when a squad of horsemen galloped past. She stopped to gape at one of the riders, who led Dick Hullum's dog.

"Mr. Trotter, what you reckon they're goin' to do with old Deuce?"

Jule did not know what had happened; she staggered and caught the fence when Adrien told her.

"Mr. Trotter, ef Dick has runned away, Deuce will shore find 'im. I *hope* he'll git off!"

When the dog and horsemen passed, Jule clutched Trotter's arm and pointed.

"Yon's the house, jest around that corner—got red roses befront 'em—one o' them three. Mr. Trotter, I'm willin' fer you to git back what's yourn, but please don't help catch Dick—promise me that! Dick's punished a plenty for what he's did to God an' man."

Jule twisted the shawl around her head and dodged into a cross street toward the Kangaroo.

Adrien must be careful; a scouting-party might pick him up. But he must hurry; another day and the box would be irretrievably lost.

It was an out-of-the-way street to which Jule had directed him, running at right angles into the graveyard road. The three small houses stood some distance apart;

two of them had climbing red roses in front. Adrien had no means of knowing which house Jule meant. Both were set back some twenty yards from the street; the ground sloped away from their rear into gullies and ravines. At the foot of the hill was the bayou, beyond which the ground rose again, forming a line of titanic breast-works against the river.

Adrien decided to try the first house. He could not approach from the front without being seen, so he crept around behind and came up from the bayou, crawling through dense thickets of mulberry and Spanish daggers. An agile man could easily sneak unnoticed through these ravines, and the thickets below offered a safe return to the Kangaroo.

Adrien lay in a clump of Spanish daggers, and reconnoitered. Jule was right. Old Shack himself came creeping toward him. It was impossible to guess out of which house he had come.

With utmost caution, Shack descended to the bayou. Although Adrien knew the general direction that he must take, it was only at intervals that he saw the shaking of a bush, or the glint of a gray figure among the greenery. The gray man vanished, then reappeared for an instant on top of the farther hill above the Kangaroo. Shack carried nothing in his hand.

Adrien crawled to the point where he had first seen Old Shack, and hesitated. Which house? He had no means of knowing.

Between the houses he could see the street, which was deserted except for a solitary carriage. To the left, three blocks away, around the corner of the graveyard road, a detail of volunteers marched toward him, followed by a crowd. The carriage moved slowly. At each house a negro man got down, made a respectful inquiry, and reported to some one within the carriage. Then the horses started on again, in the direction from which the soldiers were coming. They would probably meet at the corner.

Adrien observed all this to get the surroundings clearly in mind, then gave undivided attention to the tiny house. Apparently it was empty; but in this he put no faith, having just witnessed the murderous awakening of an apparently vacant building. If anybody were watching, he would surely be seen passing through the

vegetable garden, where a few cabbages rotted on their stalks.

Nobody challenged him. Perhaps the inmates were watching the soldiers from the front. He came to the kitchen steps, stopped, listened, heard nothing; but Dr. Bodley had heard nothing when he listened at Adam North's door.

Adrien tried the knob; the door admitted him without noise. The kitchen was empty. The inner door stood open. He could see into the dining-room—a table set for two, a vase of roses, tableware and linen, all in subdued taste. A book lay on the table—the "Maxims" of La Rochefoucauld; a shelf against the wall was filled with other volumes, French and English classics.

Beyond there seemed to be a hallway, and another door ajar. Still other doors must have been left open; for the cool draft came through. Silence, dim and fragrant, pervaded the tiny home—a restfulness and the odor of roses.

Step by step the intruder moved stealthily toward the hall, listening as he went. If the house were actually abandoned, he could search at leisure. With this idea he tiptoed along the narrow hall, and reached the open door at his left. A low murmur came from this room—a woman's voice, reading aloud. The voice stifled Adrien at the throat.

Another voice spoke up.

"Wonderful! Wonderful, Cecile; Voltaire was the wisest of them all!"

Adrien stood rigid. It was Buck Flint.

Hating himself for every step, he crawled to the door and knelt beside it in the passageway. The room was almost dark. At first he could see nothing. Cecile sat by the window, holding her book in the mellow light that filtered through the blinds. Flint lay on the bed, propped up with pillows. The bandage around his temples was very clean and white. Cecile's deft hands must have placed that bandage.

Adrien was scarcely conscious of seeing anything, yet the minutest detail of the room seared itself upon his mind. Sleeping or waking, he would always see the place. On the table, glorified by a vagrant gleam of sunshine, was the miniature of Cecile which Flint had snatched from Maggie Belle.

Cecile went on reading, in French, Voltaire's account of the death of Charles XII, the mad monarch of Sweden. Flint listened eagerly, raising himself on his elbow.

Adrien crouched in the hall; he saw, he thought, but did not feel. His faculties seemed benumbed. He had stolen into an empty house with nerves and muscles taut, weapon in hand, not knowing what he would find, and prepared for anything—anything except this!

The weapon was yet in his hand, which lacked the vigor to hold it. The hand dropped; the weapon knocked against the floor, making a sharp click.

"What's that?" Cecile glanced up in alarm. "What's that?"

"It is nothing," Flint answered. "Go on reading!"

XXXIV

CECILE read on and on and on. Adrien heard the words, the syllables, every intonation—words, syllables, and tones which had no meaning for him. The paltry universe had faded into nothing. He forgot the nearer and nearer tramp of troops outside, forgot all and everything, except the girl who sat by the window reading endlessly.

From the streets came the murmur of many voices, inarticulate as the buzzing of bees in a hive. Adrien heard, but did not heed. He was conscious that the volunteers were coming; vaguely aware that the clank of marching men approached. Closer and closer came the muttering, louder and louder, until he could almost distinguish the words.

What mattered those people or voices or volunteers? Cecile had paused in reading. How long she had been silent he did not know. Men were talking outside, not twenty feet away. Buck Flint lifted himself on one elbow. Cecile, with parted lips, was looking toward the door.

A foot struck the step, a board creaked on the gallery. Some one was coming; others were coming—many others. They were on the gallery; a heavy hand rapped at the door. Flint bounded out of bed with a pistol in his hand.

"That must be Dick Hullum and his gang," he whispered, seizing another pistol.

Cecile rose unsteadily, grasping the back of her chair. Adrien stumbled to his feet, but kept himself concealed.

Another knock on the door, more insistent and imperative. Cecile glanced at Flint. He nodded. She moved forward and opened the door.

Looking directly through the door, Adrien

saw the gallery crowded with men—men in uniform. Behind them, in the yard, stood other soldiers. Farther back, slipping down the hill was the eager mob.

With every face turned toward the door, every eye expectant, Cecile met them and stood firm, clearly outlined against the sunlight. At first sight of a woman the young officer did not remove his hat; at a second glance he uncovered with courtly deference.

"Madam, is Mr. Flint at home?"

"Mr. Flint is here," she tried to answer steadily.

"May I speak to him?"

"Certainly, sir."

When Buck Flint saw the uniforms, he laid down his weapons and stepped forward with the self-possession of one who welcomes guests beneath his roof.

"Come in, Lieutenant Vincent; I am glad to see you, sir." Flint was genuinely glad that it was Vincent, whom he knew as a gentleman of discretion. "What can I do for you?"

"I am instructed to escort you to headquarters."

"For what purpose?"

"My superiors will determine that."

"Suppose I should decide not to accept your invitation?"

For a moment Flint lapsed into his smiling daredevilry of manner. Cecile glanced up at him imploringly when the lieutenant answered:

"I should regret to use force."

Flint looked out upon the soldiers and the crowd.

"I see you have brought the force and the carriage." The carriage, which had been moving from house to house, was now standing in front of Flint's gate. "You mean to arrest me?"

"Yes."

"A military arrest? By what authority, may I ask?"

"By authority of the people of Vicksburg," the lieutenant told him.

Flint bowed courteously.

"I shall accept your invitation. Am I at liberty to dress myself properly?"

Vincent hesitated.

"You will not attempt to escape?"

"No; I shall be ready in five minutes."

"In the meanwhile, you must permit me to search your house for gambling implements."

Flint opened the door wider.

"With pleasure, gentlemen; walk in."

Even in that moment, and much as he hated this arrogant gambler, Adrien de Valence noticed the half-grudging respect which Lieutenant Vincent paid to Flint.

Cecile drew back into the room with dilated eyes, while the men glanced sidelong at her. Something in the girl's manner forbade them to stare.

Flint drew on his boots and coat, then took up his hat.

"I'm quite ready. Would you kindly post a guard, so that this lady may not be annoyed?"

"Certainly, sir. Hill and Rankin, you are detailed to guard this house until further orders."

Flint thanked him.

"I am at your service."

Vincent looked at Flint's bandage, and hesitated.

"Mr. Flint, you are hurt—you are not able to walk. Yes, yes, the carriage!"

"I thank you, lieutenant, this is a mere scalp-wound. But I can wear no hat. If you have an umbrella— The sun is very hot to-day."

"We had best take that carriage," Vincent insisted.

Buck Flint, the lieutenant, and Cecile all turned to look. An old negro had got down from beside the driver, and was halfway to the house. Seeing Flint and Cecile standing together at the door, he turned and hurried back. Immediately a tall, distinguished-looking man stepped out. Cecile gasped, clung to Flint's arm, and whispered:

"Father!"

Flint stood up defiantly and passed his arm around the girl. The white-bearded man, erect and determined, moved down the slope. The crowd parted respectfully to let him pass. Then it was that Adrien saw Judge Kinlock.

Cecile turned as if to run, but she was not the kind that runs away. She quickly adjusted her riding-habit, picked up her whip, stepped upon the gallery, and met her father. It could not have been better done. There was no scene.

Midway of the steps Judge Kinlock paused, his steady eye looking straight into that of Buck Flint, who faced him from the doorway. Not a sign of recognition, not a word passed between them. Nobody could have guessed what it meant. Adrien did not know. There was absolutely nothing to set the tongue of gossip buzzing.

Cecile did not speak to her father, nor he to her. She did not say good-by to Buck Flint; there were no tears, no hysteria, no recriminations. The thoughts and feelings of such people are not for loose babble among the multitude.

Father and daughter passed silently down the steps, beyond the rose-bush, which strewed its petals in their path. The lane through the mob closed behind them. They were gone. The incident was ended.

The volunteers swung into position around Buck Flint, forced a way through the crowd, and marched. Flint carried a hat in his hand. A kindly old gentleman held an umbrella over him. He walked steadily, eyes front, and bandaged head erect. It was more like the arrest of a Cinq-Mars or an Essex than that of a professional gambler being drummed out of town.

Through it all, Adrien stood in the darkened hall, gazing out of the open doorway, which framed a picture of what transpired. Everybody had gone except the two guards.

"Come on, Hill," said Rankin; "let's lock up the house. I wish the lieutenant had given this detail to somebody else. Things are going to happen in town!"

As the two lads came in from the front, Adrien slipped out through the back door, and circled around to the front. The soldiers and the mob went trudging toward the court-house. Will o' the Woods had suddenly appeared, capering in advance, like a stormy petrel on the wave of strife.

Adrien ran through an alley which brought him to the street some distance ahead of the crowd. Beyond the corner, a larger body of volunteers with Captain Brundage and Lynn Worthington, waited for Lieutenant Vincent's detail to arrive. Swarming people blocked the street.

Hemmed in between two sections of the rabble, the Kinlock carriage lagged behind. Several horsemen were returning from the Cemetery Road, leading old Deuce, who sniffed at the gates and strayed into the alleys. Evidently Dick Hullum had not been captured.

Adrien felt himself swept onward by the rapid rush of events which he had no part in shaping. The disorderly rabble tramped on, with small boys running and laughing beside Will o' the Woods. Adrien drew back to avoid the idiot; then he noticed a squad of mounted men who had halted a single rider.

This man carried a rifle across his pommel, and was answering their leader's questions. Nobody seemed to know him; but there were many such men riding alone with rifles across their pommels. The leader of the squad seemed to be satisfied.

"Boys, I reckon he's all right."

The lone horseman had already turned to ride away. Will o' the Woods ran up and halted, barefoot, in the dust; his pipes stopped playing. For an instant he stood and stared, then darted forward, pointing his skinny claw.

"I knows you! I knows you! You's Dick Hullum!"

Like a trapped beast, Hullum glared each way along the street; there was no escape. Before anybody realized it he sprang from his horse, bounded over a fence and ran through a garden and dropped into the ravine. He was gone, without a finger being lifted to prevent.

Will snatched a long knife from his bag and leaped toward the fence. Two men held him fast.

"Come back, fool; he'll kill you!"

For one moment there was stillness, then the uproar broke. Pell-mell they climbed the fence and fired at random.

"Stop that shooting!" Captain Brundage ordered. "Stop that shooting! Come back here—on this side of the fence—every man of you!"

"Cap'n, cap'n"—a little boy wriggled in and jerked the captain's sleeve—"yonder comes them fellers with Dick Hullum's dog."

"Here, bring up that dog!"

Old Deuce yelped delightedly and smelled the fence where his master had climbed over. When the rope was cut, he went gliding through the underbrush, swishing his tail. A few moments later, a hundred fingers pointed at the man himself, running up the farther hill. Deuce bounded along beside him, leaping up to lick his master's hand.

A dozen rifles spat through the fence. Hullum toppled over a crest which afforded temporary cover—and disappeared.

"He's kilt, he's kilt!" the boy shouted. "No, he ain't—yon he goes!"

Fifty yards farther Hullum reappeared, running swiftly up the hill toward a tumble-down cabin. The cabin stood open, its door being gone. In this he took refuge. There was no other shelter. For a wide space the ground was clear.

Captain Brundage despatched mounted men to such positions that the cabin could be surrounded, with strict orders not to approach within range.

"Hullum is a dead shot, and desperate," he told his men.

The clamoring mob besieged him, swearing and gesticulating toward the cabin.

"Rush 'im, cap; rush 'im while the trail's hot!"

"No, let him alone; he can't escape in daytime; we want to fix it so nobody will get killed."

"Cap, we ain't 'lowin' to wait until night. He mought sneak away." This old fellow spoke for a group of irregulars who had placed themselves under orders—as long as they chose to obey. "Orders or no orders, Dick Hullum ain't goin' to git away!"

They galloped off in a cloud of dust, and their cautious silhouettes appeared on another hilltop, beyond the lone cabin. Other men on foot crawled up the hillside, as far as they could find cover, and lay down like so many cats to watch that house. One impulsive boy exposed himself unwarily, and got a bullet in his shoulder—a warning that Dick Hullum never missed.

The news ran like a prairie fire, crackling and spreading through town. Citizens rushed out from everywhere, like rabbits from a burning field. Every moment the rabble grew bigger and noisier—mounted men, men on foot, coatless and hatless, with the readiest weapon they could snatch.

Brundage and Worthington conferred. Lynn urged immediate action; Brundage dissented.

"Of course, Lynn, we can go take him, but he'll kill three or four of our boys—and Dick Hullum isn't worth it."

Lynn tugged at his mustache and eyed that menacing shanty on the hillside.

"Captain, we've got to do something. We can't wait until night and run the chances of his escaping. An elephant might hide in one of these ravines."

"Be patient, Lynn; we'll find a way."

Nothing stirred upon the hillside; the cabin was stiller than death. A July sun blazed from a blue sky. High in air, the lazy buzzards wheeled. Upon the earth, men lay face downward in the heat, peering from behind every hummock. Horsemen picketed the farther hills. Everything

was quiet, except the mob, which demanded that something be done.

Lieutenant Vincent marched up and saluted.

"Captain, here is Mr. Flint; he came without trouble. We found no gambling implements in his house."

The captain turned to Flint.

"Mr. Flint, our committee has considered your case, and has no desire to be harsh. Notices were posted Sunday for all professional gamblers to leave town."

"And on many other Sundays," Flint said, smiling. "I saw none of these notices. My wound has kept me confined to the house since Thursday night."

"We have destroyed all gambling apparatus in town," Brundage told him, "and practically every gambler has gone. North, Wild Bill, Smith, and McCall are in jail. We shall hang them for the murder of Dr. Bodley."

"Dr. Bodley!" Flint exclaimed. "Good Heavens! When did this happen?"

"This morning. They shot him dead, while we were breaking in Adam North's."

"Dr. Bodley was my friend."

"Dick Hullum yonder"—Brundage jerked a thumb over his shoulder—"Dick Hullum is supposed to be the man who fired the shot."

"I had heard nothing." Flint gazed at the darkened door of the shanty on the hill, his face calm and very serious.

"Mr. Flint, were it not for your trade, we should be glad to have you as a citizen. Being a gambler, you must go."

"Go? Go?" Flint faced him aggressively.

"Yes; had you been offensive, like Cabler and others, you might have been tarred and feathered and set adrift on a log, as they have been."

"Captain, am I to understand that you threaten me?"

"I merely state the facts."

"Who says I must go?" Flint demanded, looking about him.

"The people of this town say it. I say it. You must!"

Two bright red spots crept to Flint's cheeks, burned a moment, then died away. A glitter of resentment flashed into his eyes, and passed.

"You are right, captain. The people are right. It is an insupportable condition which causes the death of such men as Dr. Bodley. What is your pleasure?"

"That you leave town."

"I shall do so at once," he said, standing upright and fearless, with a bandage about his head, a slender model of young manhood.

Brundage looked at him.

"You need not go at once, Mr. Flint, but at the first convenient moment, when you are able to travel. Until then—"

"I shall cause no trouble."

"With that understanding, sir, you are at liberty."

"Thank you, captain."

It was Brundage who first extended his hand.

"Good-by, Mr. Flint; I regret these circumstances."

"You have taught me to regret them, captain."

Flint said no more, and stood aside. General Vick, Judge Bullock, and other leaders had arrived. They were anxiously discussing the possibility of capturing Hullum without the sacrifice of valuable lives. Flint listened; then he spoke.

"Gentlemen, permit me; I shall take pleasure in capturing Dick Hullum."

"How?" Brundage inquired.

"Go and take him, sir—that's the only way to do it in daylight. He'll get away if you wait for night."

"How many men would you require?"

"None. I have an account with Dick Hullum that I prefer to settle alone."

"Impossible! He'll kill you."

"He's tried that twice; I don't believe it's in the cards. Suppose he should! You gentlemen have your families to consider." Captain Brundage glanced at Judge Bullock for advice. Buck Flint urged warmly: "Judge Bullock, I have known Hullum for several years. He has the reputation of being dangerous and desperate, but Hullum is a coward. He hasn't the nerve to wait in that cabin alone for an hour, and resolve to die fighting. I confess my consuming curiosity to see whether Dick Hullum will fight like a rat in a trap, or give up and be dragged out like a sheep. If betting were not taboo in this town, I should hazard a small sum that he'll throw down his hand."

Flint spoke rapidly, with a tinge of careless humor, but everybody realized that he was in deadly earnest.

"Let him go," General Vick said bluntly.

"Thanks." Flint accepted permission

before it could be withdrawn. "Will some one kindly lend me a rifle?" Out of the dozen offered he took his choice. "Now a pair of pistols." Flint selected carefully, being punctilious in the matter of firearms. Removing the cloth from his unhealed wound, he adjusted a soft black hat, and pulled the brim over his eyes. "This bandage makes too white a target."

The plan had been so quietly arranged, and his preliminaries so swiftly carried out, that the crowd did not realize what was happening. News began to radiate outward, from the center where Flint stood. "Buck Flint's goin' to roust Dick Hullum out of that cabin—all by himself!"

From lip to ear the word went leaping, until Judge Kinlock caught it.

"What are they doing, sir?" he asked a respectable-looking man.

"That young gambler, Buck Flint, has volunteered to capture Hullum out of that cabin, sir."

Cecile leaned forward as her father pursued the inquiry.

"Is not that a dangerous undertaking?"

"He can't do it, sir; Hullum will have plenty chance to kill 'im."

Cecile threw both arms around her father's neck.

"Don't let him go, father—don't let him do it!"

Judge Kinlock urged the driver close to the group in which Flint stood. Everybody else was trying to do the same thing. Men balanced on tiptoe, craning their necks. Slowly the carriage forced its way through a grumbling rabble. Men protested angrily. The anxiety of the white-haired man and the girl at the window prevented them from stopping the horses.

"Oh, captain!" Judge Kinlock called. Brundage presented himself, cap in hand, when he saw the lady. "Am I correctly informed that Mr. Flint proposes to dislodge that ruffian?"

"Yes, sir—a foolhardy effort, but he insists upon it."

"Was any compulsion used?"

"No, sir; we attempted to dissuade him."

"He will probably be killed?"

"Yes," Brundage assented. "Some one, perhaps several, may be killed before we get that fellow out."

Through the crowd Cecile could see Buck Flint as he unwound the bandage and put on the soft black hat.

"Thank you, captain." Judge Kinlock

thrust his head from the carriage window, hesitated, then called out: "Mr. Flint!"

Flint turned, and Judge Kinlock beckoned. The crowd opened for him to pass—opened and closed again. Hundreds of eyes were fastened angrily upon this man in the carriage who had interrupted a spectacle.

"Mr. Flint, this is not courage; it is folly—mere bravado."

Flint must have been conscious of Cecile's burning eyes in the carriage behind her father.

"I thank you, sir, for your interest; but my word is given."

There was nothing of defiance or disrespect in the gambler's tone, and naught of braggadocio; it seemed merely the regret of a gentleman who must disoblige another.

Cecile opened the carriage door on the farther side, sprang out, and ran toward him.

"You must not; you shall not!"

Flint said never a word; he was already leading her back when Judge Kinlock met them. Cecile bore up bravely. She knew both of these men too well to hope that a woman's tears would move them.

XXXV

ADRIEN DE VALENCE felt himself hopelessly pushed into the background, an idle looker-on while a tragedy was being enacted. He turned with resentful fascination toward Buck Flint.

The gambler moved deliberately and acted with prudence. He knew every ridge, ravine, and depression on that hillside, and meant to take all advantage that they presented. Dick Hullum must not suspect that he was coming, until his approach could no longer be concealed. Instead of climbing the fence where Hullum did, in full view of the cabin, Flint entered at a gate, crept through a garden, then dropped into the gully.

Every eye followed in a tense, unbreathing stillness. Men struggled for places at the fence from which they could see. Brundage pleaded and swore, then commanded, and enforced it:

"Here, men, stop that—stop looking up that hill. Hullum will know that somebody is coming. Give Flint a dog's chance. Move along, walk, talk. Attention, volunteers—fall in!"

The soldiers began forming as if to march away—a clever ruse, and the mob

began to understand. Hullum was watching, and this would give him the impression that nothing more was expected to happen at that point.

People in the street moved about busily, like puppets on a stage. It mattered not in which direction they walked, or with whom they talked, their eyes never shifted from the hillside.

"There he is!" two hundred voices whispered, as Flint's head appeared on the opposite side of the ravine, and he began crawling toward the cabin.

At present, Flint was perfectly safe; Hullum could not see him until he crossed a slight ridge, some hundred yards beyond. This would be the first crisis of danger.

The crowd continued to move about and to talk loudly; but they saw every movement of the man who crept like a lizard up the hill. Flint had now reached the first ridge and lay on his face behind it. He evidently intended to spring over and drop again.

"Look!"

A choked exclamation went up as from a single throat. A second figure emerged from the ravine and went flying in the track of the first—a wild, erratic figure, erect and laughing. Will o' the Woods had torn loose from those who held him and escaped. Every one heard him laughing and shouting; everybody saw him running and tossing his arms. Hullum must have seen him plainly.

At the noise behind, Flint turned warily, crouching flat and waving:

"Go back, Will; go back!"

The idiot laughed louder and ran on to where Flint lay. Flint dared not rise, exposing himself to Hullum's unerring fire. He tried to seize Will and drag the idiot down. Will danced about him, out of reach, danced to the summit of the ridge, and stood flapping his long arms, like some ungainly fowl upon a roost.

For an instant Dick Hullum appeared in the doorway; a spiteful tongue of flame licked out. Will sprang into the air as if he were struck, cracked his heels together, and laughed. Flint bounded to his feet and leaped over the ridge, hoping to cross before Hullum could recover for a second shot.

In that moment, when two figures showed distinctly, side by side, the rifle barked again. Will danced and laughed;

Flint plunged forward on his face and rolled beyond the ridge.

"Thar now!" observed old Ned Mun-kittrick, who persisted in hanging over the fence. "Thar now! I knowed Dick Hullum warn't goin' to miss twicet in concussion."

The watchers could see Will running toward the cabin, his head bobbing up and down like a cork on the waves. He bobbed on and on, nearer to the second ridge. As the ground rose they saw his shoulders, his waist, and then—there came one long, uncontrollable shout—Buck Flint was creeping forward, trailing his rifle, apparently unhurt.

"By gosh! Dick *did* miss twicet!" Old Ned turned and spat meditatively upon the ground. "What you reckon ails Dick?"

Buck Flint crawled on to the second ridge and crouched behind it, talking earnestly with Will o' the Woods. He caught the idiot's arm; Will scuffled to get loose. Flint pointed to a depression in the ridge at his left, and was trying to make Will understand. The idiot laughed, jerked himself free, and ran to the place which Flint had indicated.

At the same instant of time, and twenty yards apart, two figures sprang simultaneously over the ridge. Hullum could only shoot at one of them, and each must take his chance. Everybody saw the flash of the rifle.

"By gosh!" Old Ned scarcely believed his own eyes. "Dick shot right betwixt an' between; missed 'em both!"

From that point there was no cover; Flint and Will o' the Woods sped on toward the cabin. Flint went ducking and dodging, running zigzag; Will whirled around him like a dancing dervish.

Two shots—these came from a pistol—were fired through the window; the flashes tilted upward, as if discharged without aim. Five hundred people—citizens, soldiers, rabble—stood like posts, then burst into hysterical cheering. Flint was safe; he had gained the cabin, and stood against the solid logs of the house, where he could not be fired upon from within.

Nothing stirred; the man in the cabin apparently made no move, and staring hundreds dared not take their eyes away. The tense-strung universe was standing still, except Will o' the Woods, who danced about, shrieking in a high-pitched

falsetto, which carried like a woman's scream.

Flint edged cautiously to a position near the door, on the left-hand side—which was a palpable disadvantage. He seemed to realize this when he took out his pistol, for he put the weapon back again, dropped on hands and knees, and began crawling around the house. By this maneuver he would approach the door from the right.

Judge Bullock wiped the streaming sweat from his face.

"Ned, what's he doing that for?"

"Yo' onderstan', jedge," explained the old woodsman. "Dick Hullum is right-handed. Ef Flint goes up on the lef' han' side o' that do', it gives Hullum a chance to poke out his arm and shoot. But ef Flint comes up on the right-han' side, *he's* got the advantage, for Dick would have to step outside befo' he kin shoot at all."

The woodsman nodded, without missing a single move that Buck Flint made.

For many minutes, as he crawled around the house, Flint was entirely out of view. Presently he came in sight around the corner, still crawling and shoving his rifle ahead. At every advance he examined the logs to see if there were any chinks through which Hullum might shoot. Presently he stood erect on the right-hand side of the door, with a dueling-pistol in his right hand, listening, and making no sound.

"Jedge," old Ned observed critically, "don't you reckon Dick Hullum must be gettin' powerful narvous?"

That was exactly why Buck Flint waited—to keep his quarry upon a prolonged tension that Hullum could not stand.

Something had gone wrong with Hullum. Several times, as if challenging the desperado, Will o' the Woods flitted past the open door, a ragged, screeching apparition, but drew no fire.

Not a sound came from Judge Kinlock's carriage. Cecile kept her eyes fastened upon that sun-gilt hillside, that ominously silent cabin, and the two black figures.

Flint raised his pistol and rapped on the door-facing.

"Come out of there, Hullum; march out with your hands up!"

The watching people comprehended what he was saying, could almost hear it. After a moment of intense expectancy, Flint repeated his demand, then boldly entered the cabin, with a pistol in each hand. Will danced in, yelling, behind him.

Nobody breathed, nobody stirred. Another moment, and Hullum came out first, with both arms upraised. Flint seemed to be pushing him along with the muzzle of a pistol between his shoulders.

Hullum walked with head down—the redoubtable Dick Hullum—Hullum the bully—and old Deuce sneaked along at his heels. A tumult of cheers, peal after peal, broke from that frantic multitude, who danced and shouted, madmen all.

Hullum marched down the hillside, apparently dreading Will o' the Woods far more than Flint. His furtive eyes never left the boy who capered around with shrieks that taunted the hills and roused a discordant echo from the rabble.

"Keep off, Will!" Flint warned the idiot time and again.

Will circled round and round the prisoner, then lagged behind. On that bare hillside everybody could see, as if it were a play upon the stage—everybody except Flint, who dared not shift his eyes from Hullum. The idiot lagged behind, dropped upon one knee, and tumbled the whistles out of his sack. Rising with knife in hand, he passed Flint at a single bound, and leaped upon Hullum's back.

Hullum screamed with terror. Flint saw the gleam of an upraised knife, let both pistols drop, and dragged the idiot backward. Furiously they fought, tumbling on the ground. Hullum stood utterly paralyzed, watching their struggle for possession of the knife.

Over and over the gambler and the madman rolled, until Flint forced Will to his back, wrenched the knife away, and hurled it from him. Hullum might have snatched the pistols and killed them both; but his courage, even his bravado, was gone.

The disarmed idiot lay flat, screaming and yelling. Flint rose, pointed to his prisoner, and shouted:

"Come on, you men!"

Three hundred men had been looking on in a daze, like Hullum. They surged forward in a solid mass and scattered the fence before them. They dashed into the ravine and scrambled up the farther side; the vacant slope was black with swarming, flying figures. A dozen hands grappled Dick Hullum, who made no protest.

"Here, don't hurt that man!" Flint ordered.

The volunteers formed at once and began to move, with their prisoner in a hollow

square. Cecile flushed happily at sight of Buck Flint, amid all those cheering people, eager to shake his hand, tossing their hats aloft, gone daft with enthusiasm over a gallant deed.

General Vick, Worthington, Brundage, all took off their hats in the respect of man for man, and bowed low as they shook the gambler's hand. It was Ned Munkittrick who lifted his jubilant voice and called back to those who could not follow:

"He ain't hurt at all, boys; not a single scratch!"

"Thank God!" the old men answered him.

"Thank God!" Cecile murmured, glancing into her father's face.

It was no use. Judge Kinlock made no answer, though he was very pale and his lips trembled.

"Drive on," he ordered the coachman.

Adrien de Valence was foremost among those who rushed up the hill. Reaching Buck Flint, he stopped and hated himself for a spasm of ungenerous rage at the applause bestowed upon the gambler. Then he lifted his hat, as a gentleman should, and grasped Flint's hand with an honest word of praise, for the deed was that of a gentleman.

Buck Flint heard nothing of what these people said—scarcely saw the men whose faces beamed with delight. He was gazing back, across the ravine, to a carriage which drove rapidly away. In another minute the vehicle was gone.

Flint turned and started home. The crowd separated, some following Dick Hullum to the jail, others trudging after Buck Flint, easing their feelings in an occasional cheer.

Adrien stood deliberating. It seemed futile to make plans. He had made many and carried out none. In all the hubbub his father's heirlooms were more distant than ever. One thing had been accomplished—Old Shack's conspiracy was on every lip, and people would not be so incredulous when the time ripened for Pibrac to expose it. Adrien thought that he was thinking of this; in reality, he was thinking of Cecile. Nobody disturbed Tom Trotter the obscure.

A few stragglers remained on the hillside, when somebody plucked Adrien by the sleeve. It was Skinny, he of the spindle-shanks, the big eyes, and the preternaturally wise expression.

"Mr. Trotter, please come talk to Jule; she's all broke up sence they kotched Dick Hullum. Jule wants to see you mighty bad." Skinny grinned maliciously; he had scant sympathy with Jule upon the score of Hullum's predicament. "Folks says they goin' to hang Dick right away; ef I don't hurry, I mought miss it. Come along, mister!"

Adrien followed the boy; he might as well go in one direction as another. Up the hill, over the crest, they went, and started down the farther slope, at the foot of which was the Kangaroo.

"The old place looks mighty lonesome, don't it, mister?" Skinny's eyes twinkled. "I wisht Grogan hadn't skun out so swift; I'd shore love to see 'em hang Grogan alongside o' Dick Hullum. Gee, he shore beat me a plenty! That's why I was always tryin' to git back to Uncle Ed."

"Uncle Ed?" Adrien inquired absently.

"Yep; he runs one o' them broad-horn keel-boats. Beat me a plenty, too, when he was drunk."

The lad talked on, but made no impression. Adrien could not consider these Kangaroo folk in the light of ordinary human beings, with family ties, mothers, wives, children; they seemed so set apart, so different.

Just ahead was Jule's house, wabbling on its stilts against the hillside. Jule was leaning in her door. Perhaps even she was some man's sister, some woman's daughter. Adrien had never thought of that. To him she was one of the Kangaroo characters, a pawn in the game of plunder and murder and sudden death.

As Adrien climbed the trembling steps, Jule caught his hands in both of hers.

"Tell me, is they kotched Dick?"

"Yes."

"So I heerd; so I heerd. I reckon Dick is about flung his last card."

Adrien nodded his compassion for this desolate woman in her gown of dingy cloth.

"Well"—Jule's eyes were tearless and scorching—"well, I ain't done nothin' to give Dick away. 'Twarn't Dick's fault, mister, not ontire. Dick uster be mighty good to me. It all come o' that Maggie Belle."

"What are you goin' to do?"

"Tain't nothin' I kin do, mister; home's too fer away, an' Ed wouldn't take me back—not after all this."

"Who is Ed?"

"Ed's my husband—he's a flatboatman; tol'able well fixed."

"Where is your home?"

"My native home? Up in Injianny, whar I fust seen Ed. He uster trade up thar, with his boats."

"Can't you go back?"

Jule laughed harshly.

"It's a far ways, an' takes money to travel."

"If you had the money?"

"Tain't nothin' to hinder me; my folks don't know about—about this." Jule nodded miserably toward the Kangaroo and all the wreckage that it meant. She dropped into a chair and rested her chin in her hands. "I reckon I could go back home; pa would take me in—ain't heerd o' me in five long years. Ed treated me so bad that I hated to let pa know." She rocked back and forth. "It mought ha' been better to put up with Ed and the Lula, ruther than—"

"The Lula!" Adrien exclaimed.

"The Lula; that war Ed's boat—tradin' all up an' down these rivers. Ed made plenty money till he took to drinkin' so hard."

"The Lula—Captain Ed!" Adrien repeated to himself; then he questioned Jule. "What did your husband look like?"

It was not a flattering description that Jule gave, but accurate and recognizable. Adrien knew she meant Captain Ed, and knew where Captain Ed lay—among the fishes.

Skinny volunteered additional and positive information.

"Uncle Ed shore was a cusser."

Adrien turned. "He was your uncle? So Jule here is your aunt? You never told me about that."

Jule wagged her head wisely.

"Skinny don't tell *all* he knows, not by a jugful. Skinny's done larnt. But sence we got to talkin' 'bout Ed, I plumb forgot to tell how come I sont for you." She looked out the door and glanced around the house. Nobody was near. "It's yo' box. For a week I been 'spicionin' that Old Shack was fixin' to travel. He's a sly fox, an' don't never git *his* tail in no crack. That's how come he's kep' out o' this muss. Folks in Vicksburg ain't got no idee o' half the rascality Shack's up to. Sence them fellers is got in jail, you bet he's goin' to light out from here. He's skeered they mought blab on him to save their own hides. I knows

his ways, an' I've been a watchin' him, same as you been watchin' him. Jule ain't no fool, ef she do look kinder onery!"

"What's he been doing?"

"Gittin' things together, like a jay-bird stuffin' acorns in a hole. I got it sot in my head that he tuk that box to Hord's house, right over yonder, next to Buck Flint's. He's been sneakin' back an' forth a mighty heap, an' Shack wouldn't take no sech chances ef 'twarn't for sumpin' big. I seen him come from over yonder jes' befo' this hullabaloo busted loose."

"Did he bring the box?"

"Reckon not. You'll find yo' box, to my thinkin', right in Hord's house, jes' this side o' Buck Flint's. I got so flustered this mornin' I never p'inted you keerect. O'cose, I ain't carin' no longer, sence Maggie Belle is gone." Jule rose abruptly and shut off the conversation. "It's gittin' todes night, an' you got to hurry."

Adrien passed out, intent upon his own affair. At the steps, ashamed of himself, he turned, came back, and wrote a few lines.

"Here, Skinny, take this note to Lawyer Worthington; he'll see that nobody disturbs you." The boy stared open-mouthed. "And, Skinny"—Adrien put a hand under the boy's chin and lifted his face. Skinny had very blue eyes, shrewd and honest—"Skinny, don't let anybody see that note, it might get us all into trouble."

"Thar, now!" Skinny remarked triumphantly. "I kep' a tellin' Jule you warn't like the rest of them fellers. You knows a monstrous heap o' dictionary, an' got friends 'mongst the big bugs—I bet on that. Jule, ain't I tole you he don't talk like them folks, 'ceptin' when he ketches himself?"

Adrien smiled at the boy's sharp insight, but felt uneasy at the transparency of his own deception. Others might see through it as well as Skinny.

"Good-by, Jule; I'm going to try Hord's," he said.

"Mought be a heap better ef you could ketch up with Old Shack an' foller him. That's the sartin way, but it's dangersome."

XXXVI

It had come to the mid part of the afternoon when Adrien de Valence left Jule and hurried back to the hilltop. On the crest he paused, overlooking the little town. One house alone now interested him—Hord's, where Shack had possibly concealed the iron

box. There it was, a quarter of a mile away, next to one that he knew so well—the house of Buck Flint.

That epochal 6th of July had been a clear, intensely hot day, whose glaring sun poured down upon wide streets and searched among isolated houses. From that sun nothing could be hid; beneath it there were no illusions. Men looked squarely at one another's souls, stripped to their naked and primeval passions. It was this sun which inflamed the furious rabble about the jail, hotly demanding the blood of five miscreants who cowered within.

Adrien did not stand forth boldly on the hilltop to be seen of all men, but knelt in a thicket, trying to follow with his eye the path which led to Hord's. It was easy to go astray in those labyrinthine gullies.

He had already chosen his way, and had started down the hillside, when Old Shack rose from a clump of Spanish daggers, beckoned him with a pistol, and dropped flat again. Adrien wormed through the tangle of needle-pointed leaves until he reached the gray man.

"Trotter, are you well armed?"

Shack showed his teeth like a wolf run to earth and snapping.

"Got two pistols."

"Then come with me; I got one extry rifle. Tite Higgins was goin', but he got scared an' run away."

In a hollow behind the crest of the hill two excellent horses were hid, the very best that Shack had gathered in his scouting. Each had a pair of saddle-bags; two rifles leaned against a sapling.

Neither Shack nor Adrien saw a third man on that hill—if Will o' the Woods could be called a man. Will lay in the bushes, on his stomach, watching every movement with colorless eyes. Not a sound he made, no more than a panther lurking in the swamp.

Shack began leading his horse to the road, keeping well out of sight. Passing an open space, he stopped and faced the town. The gray man labored under feverish excitement sternly suppressed. He outstretched one powerful arm, like some malignant demon blasting a people with anathema.

"Aye, set your fires, and hang your outcasts, but when I come again I'll start a blaze that you'll remember. Fools! Ye destroy the bats and let the eagle go—the one man that can give the word to lay your

city in ashes!" Shack's boundless egotism flamed out in denunciation.

"The one man," Adrien repeated to himself, thrilled with a new idea.

Why not shoot the one man, and put an end to his conspiracy? Adrien fingered his trigger and knew he would not miss. Old Shack was looking straight at him, and there was no suspicion in his eyes. To kill a trusting dog—that would be murder!

"Come!"

Shack threw himself across his horse and kept behind the bushes, until he could no longer be seen from town. Farther northward he took the open road.

"Now ride; the road is safe. All them squads what went out this mornin', they've done come back—none of 'em wants to miss the hangin'."

"The hangin'?"

"Yes, them devils are bent on hangin' Adam North, Dick Hullum, and the others. It's jes' as well; they wouldn't foller my orders."

For miles Shack rode on, never lifting his head, never speaking. Sometimes it was a leaf that rustled beside the road, sometimes it was a gliding shadow that crossed behind them—Will o' the Woods was following. The tireless idiot took short cuts and kept abreast of their horses.

Five miles above town Shack met an empty wagon and halted the driver.

"Did you deliver them barrels o' whisky?"

"Yep," the man answered.

"Give 'em to Joe?"

"Yep."

"Is Spike got there with the boat?"

"Yep; jes' whar you tole 'em to wait."

Shack started to ride on.

"Hole up, cap'n, I ain't calkerlatin' it's overly safe for me to be goin' back to Vicksburg."

"Who knows anything 'bout you?" Shack snarled. "Maybe you better sneak in to Dunnaway's and lie low for a while. Take that wagon."

"Cap," the fellow persisted, "Low Joe and Spike is gittin' monstrous skittish 'bout these here hangings; they ain't plumb satisfied with the way things is goin'. Ef you don't git thar tol'able quick, 'twon't neither one o' them be thar. They wouldn't ha' stayed this long 'cepting they 'lowed you was bringin' vallybles; and then 'twarn't nuthin' but a couple o' barrels o' whisky."

"It's their business to obey orders. You see what Dick Hullum and them other fellers got for goin' it on their own hook?"

"Yep, I knows that."

"Well, then, git along to Dunnaway's, an' keep yo' mouth shut."

"Jes' as you say, cap."

Shack loosed his rein; Adrien kept close beside him, hoping he would talk. Presently the gray man turned his head and smiled.

"Joe thought I was sendin' vallybles in his care; wonder does he calkerlate I'd trust 'im, an' let him know it? Not me!"

Jule had guessed right.

Two miles farther north Shack turned into a bridle-path that wound among the hills. He never spoke until they reached a log cabin with one room at either end of a broad, wide-open hall. The old man with the shotgun didn't rise from the log that served him for a stool. Shack looked keenly around.

"Baxter, where's Sol?"

"Gone down to Dunnaway's. Sol was 'bliged to hear some news. Kinder ticklish, ain't it, cap? Tell me they's fixin' to hang a hull passel of 'em."

"Good riddance! Wish I could get shet o' some more fools—small 'taters what think they can run my business!"

"That's so, cap; orders is orders with me."

"Look after these hosses. Trotter, you come with me."

There was no path the way Shack went, but he never hesitated, threading among the trees and gullies until the yellow Yazoo waters gleamed through a jungle of underbrush. Shack walked slowly, his head bent in deep thought. Adrien followed, with every faculty whetted to a wire edge. Hanging upon their rear, Will o' the Woods dodged from tree to tree, nimble as a squirrel and noiseless as the dying sunbeams that flickered on the ground.

"The one man!" Adrien kept repeating to himself, obsessed with the idea that he ought to kill.

Shack's broad shoulders presented a target which could not be missed at twenty feet. If conditions were reversed, and Shack suspected his identity, he would murder Adrien without compunction; but the outlaw kept his back turned, and Adrien de Valence was no assassin.

Being well out of view from the house, Shack stopped.

"Trotter," he said, "you'll see it for yourself, an' I might as well tell you. I come up here to hide some stuff—too risky trying to carry it off." His searching eyes read the young Frenchman's face aright, for Shack saw no covetous desires. "Higgins was comin' with me. Tite's tol'able square; but Joe an' Spike, either one, would steal a thruppence off a dead man's eye. Now listen to me. Whilst we are movin' it from the boat, don't yo' take yo' eyes off of 'em—not for a minute; an' keep yo' weepin' handy. They'd kill me to get a stake, an' light out for Texas. That's why I was scared to come by myself."

Adrien nodded that he understood. Old Shack turned his back and walked on.

A steep, muddy bank rose level with the boarded top of a shanty-boat. Shack gave a low whistle. Two men tumbled out of the cabin door, and glanced swiftly at each other when they saw that Shack was not alone.

"Trotter, you go first."

Shack pushed him toward the plank. It was a perilous situation for the man called Trotter, with Old Shack behind him, and two other desperadoes on the boat.

"Fetch them barrels out on deck."

Shack took his stand in the doorway, to prevent Joe and Spike from consulting while they rolled out the whisky.

"Knock out the bung o' this'n."

Joe looked at Spike. Their scheme was going wrong.

When they had opened the bung, Shack took a piece of wire from his pocket and bent the end into a hook. With this he fished around inside of the barrel and pulled out a knotted mass of cord. Taking one strand at a time, he drew forth eight long, narrow bags of buckskin. They clinked as they struck the deck, that unmistakable clink of money—gold money.

Spike and Low Joe avoided each other's eyes—an avoidance more sinister and eloquent than their glances. It escaped neither Shack nor Adrien.

"Joe, knock the other barrel in the head; 'tain't nothin' but water." With long, bare arms Joe reached in for the plunder. "Here, Spike, lend a hand; this box is heavy."

If Old Shack had not been so intent upon watching Spike and Joe, he could not have failed to notice Adrien's violent start when Joe lifted out the iron box. There were other packages, of which

Adrien took no thought. Joe and Spike glared at each other for two blind fools who had let a fortune slip.

"Fetch that keg out o' the cabin," Shack ordered. In the keg he curled his eight yellow bags of gold. "Nail it up for me, Joe. Hurry!"

Shack had foreseen every detail. Low Joe struggled up the muddy bank with the keg. Spike followed him with the iron box. Adrien came next, bearing nothing more precious than a couple of quilts, which Shack had directed him to strip from the bunks. Shack came last, with a small package under his left arm, and a spade in his left hand. Adrien knew why he kept his right hand free.

Shack pointed them to the burned-out stump of a cypress which stood half-way up the bank. Around this stump he spread the quilts, to conceal their tracks, and to catch the fresh dirt. Within its black cavity Spike and Joe dug a hole to bury the treasure.

When this was filled with dirt, Shack threw in some leaves and set them afire. The fire had burned down when Shack despatched Joe on an errand to the shanty-boat, and immediately followed him. Adrien afterward remembered that he heard a noise on the boat, as if one of the barrels had been dropped on its side.

Then Shack called for Spike to come. Spike barely had time to get aboard when there came a choking cry, a brief struggle, and a splash in the river—like the splash that Captain Ed's body had made. Adrien listened for the sound of swimming. The river floated on without a murmur.

"My turn next!"

Adrien braced himself as Old Shack came slowly up the bank. The outlaw said nothing; he began rolling up the quilts, being careful to spill none of that fresh dirt.

"Reckon I jes' as well dump these quilts in the river. Them fellers is gone where they won't need no quilts."

Adrien kept his tongue; there was no need for words, the situation being plain. Shack could not trust those other men, nor would he be likely to trust Adrien. Shack was powerful, fifty, and heavy on his feet. Adrien was twenty-six, lithe, active, and a good shot. Man to man alone, Adrien had no fear; but if they went back to that log-house, two other speculators with shotguns would tip the scales desperately against him.

After throwing the quilts in the river, Shack turned and climbed the bank again.

"Come along, Trotter," he said, and that was all.

Old Shack did not know it, but he had maneuvered past a crisis. Had he ordered his companion to go in front, Adrien was determined to kill him then and there.

Old Shack's face and manner were just as usual, inscrutable, self-contained. He walked slowly in advance, his hands clasped behind him in profound contemplation. Adrien was also in deep thought—somewhat deeper, perhaps, but his hands were not behind him. Again and again his fingers closed around the butt of his pistol. No, he couldn't do it.

Baxter and Sol were waiting for them at the cabin—Sol, slouchy and indolently venomous, with eyes that never looked into those of his fellow man. Shack moved a chair to the edge of the open hallway, and sat gazing into the woods. Baxter kept his place on the steps, and held his shotgun across his knee. Sol leaned his rifle against the house, and leaned himself against the same convenient resting-place.

Adrien tilted his chair against the wall in such a position that he could observe Old Shack, and nobody could attack him from the rear. If he hoped to awake in the morning, he must not let night catch him with these three.

Shack sat in absolute silence, then rose and wandered into the woods, with hands still clasped behind him, and stubby beard brushing his breast. Baxter got up and stretched himself lazily.

"Come 'long, Sol, he's feed them hosses."

Adrien seized the chance, went into one of the rooms, and took out his note-book. Hurriedly he set down the exact location of that cypress stump while every detail was fresh in his mind. To this he added memoranda of recent occurrences, with names and descriptions of various speculators.

Absorbed in his work, he heard nothing, until Old Shack's foot struck the floor. Shack came straight toward the door of that room. Adrien stuffed the book into his coat-pocket, picked up a gourd of water, and began to drink. Shack glanced in, walked across, and looked into the other room, then seated himself in the hall between the two.

"Come here, Trotter; I want to talk with you."

They drew their chairs together at the edge of the gallery, facing the venerable oaks. Here and there a towering pine caught the sun's last glory. Shack gazed outward through long, dim avenues of peace.

"Trotter, are you gittin' scared?"

"No," the answer came promptly.

Shack studied him without the change of a feature.

"I wonder where you git yo' grit! It is sorter different from the kind them other fellers have got. I'm goin' to take you along with me."

Adrien never replied, only shifted his position so as to have a clear view through the hall. The papers crackled in his pockets; but he needed no reminder of the danger. The gray man spoke again, without looking up.

"No use gittin' scared about things like this. If 'twarn't for some few hitches, 'twouldn't be no sport tryin' to work out a big scheme like ours."

Beneath his smooth exterior, Shack was violently agitated. His eyes began to roll; the thick, powerful fingers clenched against his palm.

"I could have throwed a thousand men into Vicksburg, and took them fellers out o' jail; but they kept on thinkin' they knowed better'n what I did. It'll larn the others a lesson. I reckon it serves Dick Hullum right; he got us into all that trouble at Natchez. An' Gid Barlow—I wish they'd hang him for not ketchin' that young Frenchy in Orleans. If young Frenchy hadn't got away, we'd had mighty short talk in this hoss swap."

Shack was muttering to himself. He sprang up and strode to and fro, with both arms waving.

"For a while I was powerful oneasy; but 'twon't make no difference. All the devils below ain't goin' to hinder me from givin' the word. I'll have a hundred lives for every one o' theirs!"

Adrien gazed in blank astonishment; it was as if the flames had suddenly started up through the cold, gray ashes of a burned-out volcano.

"I will give the word. Noble spirits from Virginia to Texas had suddenly started up through the cold, gray ashes of a burned-out volcano.

The gray man paced the gallery like a rabid beast, swinging his great arms and mumbling like thunder that dies away in the distance. Every time his back was

turned, Adrien thought of what one shot would accomplish.

Shack's sudden fury wore itself out and he crumpled into his chair again. The flames had leaped up and disappeared, leaving those grim, gray ashes as before.

Baxter, having fed the horses, slouched back to the house and sat on the step with that inevitable shotgun. Sol came and dropped beneath the tree. Night was settling down. Four unspeaking men sat, busy with their own thoughts, while from wood and field and far-off river came the mingled monotone of nature's lullabies.

Adrien de Valence was scarcely conscious when he began to hear another sound. At first it might have been the twittering of a sleepy thrush, or the evening call of some distant quail. Then it floated upon the still air like the drowsy humming of a cloud of birds.

Nearer and nearer the sound approached, a medley of many notes; suddenly one shrill peal seemed to shake itself free and go climbing like a rocket to the skies. Will o' the Woods stepped from behind a cedar-tree, and came marching down the slope, piping to each mincing step.

Adrien sat thrilled and frozen with a sickening dread. The chill blood crept to his finger-tips. Lifting his head very slowly—he could not help it—he glanced at the idiot. Twenty yards away, knee-deep in the grass, Will paused to pipe a merrier strain, with impish ingenuity prolonging the agony of suspense.

Adrien suffered his glance to fall upon Old Shack. The gray man was studying him with intense anxiety, beneath which lay the malevolence of a fiend. Shack breathed hard; his great chest rose and fell, bellied out by some inner tumult.

"Trotter," he whispered hoarsely, "you ain't leary o' that boy, is you?"

"No." Adrien did not recognize his own voice.

Shack settled back in his chair without once looking at Will. Baxter moved the pipe from his mouth, and observed:

"Here comes that higgledy-piggledy boy; he ain't scouted 'round these parts for the longest."

Solemnly and deliberately the piping idiot minced his way to the edge of the gallery. There he stopped, no vestige of expression upon his vacant face. He halted and gravely pointed his finger at Baxter.

"I knows *you*—you's ole Baxter Azoo."

Baxter let out a guffaw.

"Will don't never forget nobody that he's once set eyes on!"

Will moved on a couple of paces, stopped, and grinned at Adrien. The slow seconds dragged. Again that skinny finger rose and stiffened; with distinct emphasis the words came.

"I knows *you*. You's Adrun Vally. Seed you in Marengo."

XXXVII

"I KNOWS *you*; you's Adrun Vally. Seed you in Marengo."

The idiot had unmasked him. Adrien de Valence sprang to his feet, fiercely glad to strip his humiliating disguise and stand forth like a man—a man in the open. Gripping his pistols, he faced Old Shack without subterfuge or evasion. He would kill the gray outlaw first, and take chances with the other two.

But Shack did not look up; he sat as one suffering in a trance, a sleeper whose limbs and lips trembled in a nightmare. He was not looking at Will o' the Woods; he was not looking at Adrien; his eyes were fixed upon the floor, both hands clutching his chair, as if bracing himself to meet an ordeal.

Subconsciously Shack had heard what the idiot said, every syllable of it, but it meant nothing to him. Naught he cared for what Will might say to Baxter or to Trotter the obscure; it was only what the idiot *might say to him*. Shackleford Orr dreaded that the boy would confront him, would call him by name—a name that had never been heard in these parts. He dreaded that Will might tell where he had seen the man who bore that name.

Barefoot and noiseless, the half-wit lad passed on from Adrien, until he stood directly in front of Old Shack. The gray man's eyelids quivered; the blood beat against his temples. Will stopped and stared, but said nothing, absolutely nothing. He only stared for an interminable period.

Presently he chuckled, and Old Shack winced. Then the idiot laughed outright, so suddenly, so harshly, that the sturdy outlaw stumbled up and overturned his chair behind him. Adrien faced him, alert, weapons in hand. Shack never glanced at him, nor at Will; he wheeled and ran into the left-hand room.

Baxter looked around. Sol turned languidly. Will o' the Woods sidled off a few steps, sat cross-legged upon the ground, and resumed his piping.

Like a baited bull, De Valence had faced each of them in turn, as each had seemed to make a threatening movement. Shack disappeared into the left-hand room. Father and son settled back placidly. Old Baxter winked at Sol.

"Will sho' is comercial. Cap can't abide him. 'Tain't no harm in Will; he never hears nothin' an' never tells nothin'."

Adrien stood irresolute against the wall, with a vigilant eye upon the door. He could see the gray man's shoulders; those gray eyes peered out at Will, not at himself. Was it possible that Shack had not heard Will's distinct calling of his name, a name which had been upon every speculator's tongue for many anxious weeks?

Adrien's horse was standing, haltered, at the corn-crib. He did not dare to put on the saddle in plain view of the house. Baxter's shotgun, and Shack's well-known skill with a rifle, forbade such an enterprise. Night was coming on; perhaps he could slip away on foot—which might be safer, for Shack's confederates were doubtless guarding the road.

Adrien could afford to make no false step. Shack would surely search him, and would read a death-warrant in the cipher.

Will o' the Woods piped on. Baxter sat and chuckled to himself; Sol reposed lazily underneath the tree, and Shack's gray eyes were peering out of the door.

Adrien stood and thought. Singularly enough, he thought mostly of Cecile, and wondered if she would ever know. Not even Jule or Skinny knew that he had left Vicksburg in company with Old Shack. Seconds were precious, yet he wasted them in thinking of Cecile's miniature on Buck Flint's table, from which he would never have opportunity to reclaim it.

Inside the left-hand room the disconcerted outlaw was also thinking, and muttering to himself:

"Got to git rid o' that boy, comin' round here jes' when I need all my nerve an' hoss-sense! Baxter wouldn't touch him with a forty-foot pole. Maybe Trotter mought do the killin'; s'posin' Will took a fool notion to foller me, same as he follered Dick Hullum and them Frenchies from Marengo? Marengo! Marengo!" he repeated; then—"Adrien Vally!"

Old Shack shrank deeper into the room and halted, stock-still.

"Adrien Vally! Marengo! Will don't make no mistakes about people, and that's who he says Trotter is. 'Tain't onpossible, an' I can't afford to make no mistakes, neither."

If the idiot boy had spoken truly, the world was far too small for himself and the man who called himself Tom Trotter. Shack peered out at Trotter, and caught Trotter watching him.

Now that he came to consider it, Trotter had a mighty suspicious way of nosing around when things were happening. Yet Shack could not believe that the sandy-haired, freckle-faced horse-thief, with the drawling tongue of a mountaineer, was the dandified, quick-stepping young Frenchman who bounded off the boat at Natchez. Shack might have dismissed the notion as absurd, except for his superstitious confidence in Will o' the Woods.

Again he looked out, this time at the idiot, who still sat cross-legged, piping on his whistles. In spite of himself, the outlaw shivered. Many a time he had heard that piping in uncanny places, and he always shivered.

"Will don't make no mistakes," he kept repeating to himself. "'Twon't do no harm to be sartin'."

When he emerged from the room, Old Shack had caught a firm grip on himself. The suspected man sat in a splint-bottom hickory chair, close against the wall, and Shack felt sure he was watching warily beneath his lashes.

The gray outlaw resumed his pacing back and forth, his hands behind him, never looking toward Adrien. At every turn he approached nearer and nearer, from the rear, and to the left.

Nobody would have imagined that so bulky a man could be so quick. Adrien hadn't time to spring up when a pair of powerful arms, like the tentacles of a devil-fish, wound themselves about him, chair and all. He tried to struggle; tried to get a footing; Shack kept dragging him back and back.

"Baxter, fetch a rope!" Baxter turned sluggishly and stared. "Don't sit there gawkin' at me; fetch a rope."

Old Shack couldn't say much; he needed his breath. Baxter shuffled into one of the rooms; Sol got up and moved toward the house.

"Here, Sol, grab hold o' this feller." Baxter came with a halter. "Tie his elbows; tie 'em good—to the chair."

From the celerity with which this was accomplished, Baxter must have been an adept. Adrien was securely trussed, arms bound behind him, and legs made fast to the rungs of the chair. Will o' the Woods eyed them wisely, but never stirred or missed a single note. Old Shack arose, and stood looking down upon his prisoner.

"Now, Tom Trotter, you set still. If you be Tom Trotter, you ain't in no danger; but Will called you Adrien Vally. Will, is this feller Adrien Vally?"

The idiot took his lips from the pipes, and laughed. Will always laughed; perhaps he nodded in confirmation, perhaps he did not. Nobody could inveigle Will into a direct answer. The boy paid no further attention, but emptied his whistles upon the ground. From the bottom of his sack he took a long, keen knife, whetted it on a stone, and began trimming a whistle.

Shack wheeled from the idiot to his prisoner.

"S'arch him, Baxter."

Baxter missed nothing. He produced all the papers and memoranda, the cipher and translations from the pocket in Adrien's boot-leg. Shack knew at a glance what they were, and his face blackened.

"Where did you get them dockuments?"

Adrien made no reply. Shack stopped and considered.

"Baxter, you and Sol lift this feller inside." They bore Adrien's chair into the room and set him down, facing the door. "Now, Baxter, both of you go up to that log and keep a sharp lookout."

The captain did not want his henchmen to hear what was said, particularly about the loss of the cipher—a disquieting fact which had been jealously concealed from the rank and file of speculators.

The threatening bulk of Shackleford Orr confronted his prisoner—a burly gray shape blocking the doorway and shutting out the twilight. All the drowsing world beyond passed from Adrien's thoughts.

"Been spyin' on me, has you? Nary feller ain't done that yit—*an' lived.*"

De Valence was brave. He had deliberately entered into a desperate enterprise, not as a romantic boy who hazards his life upon the pitch and toss of excitement, nor yet for the purpose of recovering stolen property. To prevent a hideous

wrong upon thousands of innocent people—that were well worth a knightly sacrifice. Steadily, without apparent fear, his black eyes met the gray ones.

"Where did you get that cipher writin'?"

"I wrote it myself."

The outlaw was taken aback by the boldness of his answer. Shack was accustomed to seeing men cringe and beg for mercy.

"You don't talk like you are scared."

"I'm not. You are the man who should be trembling in your boots."

"Me?"

"Yes, you. If you knew what I know—what a thousand men know—you'd crawl through every canebrake in the South, trying to get away without a broken neck."

"Look here, Trotter, you can't bluff me. Where did you l'arn that cipher writin'?"

"From the book that Dick Hullum lost at Natchez, when he and Tite Higgins robbed Judge Kinlock's house."

Shack betrayed neither surprise nor anger at Adrien's knowledge of this unfortunate affair, his mind being intent upon something else.

"Does anybody know 'bout that cipher writin', 'ceptin' you?"

"Thousands will soon know it; every man who can read print."

"What do you mean?"

"That book of Dick Hullum's will be printed and distributed broadcast. That will set a hundred thousand men to hanging your murderers, as fast as they are caught. Every copy has a full description of Shackleford Orr, alias Captain Jarrot, and many other names."

Adrien sent this shaft at random, but it struck home. Shack wavered for a moment, glancing toward the idiot, who pursued his trimming of whistles with his big knife. The gray figure bristled defiantly.

"That ain't so easy, youngster; the rope ain't wove what can hang *me!*"

"So Dick Hullum thought."

"Don't bandy words with me—you ain't got time." Shack's hand trembled, and his features twitched. "I s'picioned you was a heap more eddicated than what you let on; but I never figured that nobody would be sech a fool. Reckon that's jes' about yo' last play. Baxter"—Shack turned his head and called—"come here an' take a good look at them ropes. Draw 'em plenty tight. Good! Now go down to Dunna-way's an' git four reliable men. Let two of

'em be fellers what won't min' handlin' Will. Them whistles gives me the chills an' ager."

Baxter nodded dubiously.

"Ain't nobody down thar what's itchin' to handle Will."

"I don't aim for nobody to kill 'im," Shack snapped petulantly. "Not even to hurt 'im. Jes' git that idiot away, an' don't let 'im foller me."

"I'll try, cap."

"An' fetch a steady mule—we got sum-pin' to tote to the river." Baxter glanced at the prisoner, and understood for whom that steady mule would be required. "Hold up, Baxter; take Sol along, an' be gone not less'n a hour."

Baxter and Sol departed. Shack placed his chair across the threshold and sat straddlewise, with both elbows on its back, sullenly regarding Adrien. Adrien sat just inside the room, facing the door. While Shack could look both ways along the hall, Adrien could see nothing, except the door to the room directly opposite.

Shack said nothing. He scarcely moved. Will came slipping in barefoot, to grin at Adrien over the outlaw's shoulder. Shack looked up, and sprang from his chair.

"He! He! He!" the idiot chuckled, and scampered away. Immediately the pipes began their maddeningly suggestive strains.

Shack changed his position, to keep an eye on Will as well as Adrien.

"Where's that book what Dick Hullum lost?"

"In the hands of a man who will print it when he fails to hear from me. You will never live to give the word on Christmas eve."

"What do *you* know about Christmas eve?"

Shack half rose from his chair in sheer astonishment. Adrien looked at him unflinchingly.

"We know your plan for a wholesale murder; we know the names of your confederates from Virginia to Texas. Next week a hundred thousand men will be hunting you down like wild beasts—you and every man whose name is on that list. It's gone; you need not try to get it back."

Shackleford Orr was also a man of courage; his trade required courage. He never blustered, and he rarely threatened. Seating himself again, straddlewise of that chair, his chin rested on its back.

"Well," he remarked, almost meditatively, "well, I don't know what's goin' to happen—an' *you'll never know.*"

"Very true. I'm telling this so that you will not attempt to carry out a vile scheme which has become known of all men."

The blood had flowed again to Adrien's face and driven away its pallor; in spite of himself, the treacherous pallor returned and drove out the blood. He was very pale, and felt it.

Shack sat in silence, his chin resting on the back of his chair, contemplating the helpless man. Those malicious gray eyes were all that Adrien could see or think of.

Neither of them noticed a cessation of the pipes. Old Shack did not hear Will o' the Woods stealing up behind him with knife uplifted. Adrien barely glimpsed a flying figure that launched itself through the air and fell upon the outlaw's back. Will's left elbow hooked itself around the thick neck and stubby whiskers, while his right hand plunged the knife between the gray man's shoulders.

Shack, entangled in his chair, staggered backward and upward, striving with both hands to tear the death-grip from his throat. Stumbling and turning in the hallway, he passed beyond the door, and Adrien could no longer see him.

Adrien heard them fall, heard them roll over and over again on the floor. The planks creaked; he could hear their hard breathing. Twist as he might, and tug against the ropes, he could not see what was happening; could only hear that terrific struggle in the hall.

Shack gained his feet and staggered past the door. Will had twined his skinny legs around the outlaw's waist, and maintained his grapple about the neck. Shack was tearing at Will's legs and jerking at his elbows. The idiot clung on, like a bristling catamount to the back of a grizzly bear. The knife rose and flashed and fell, more swiftly than a weaver's shuttle.

Uncertainly they tottered across the narrow space where Adrien could see, and passed again from sight. He heard nothing but the shuffling of Shack's feet and a bumping against the wall, as if the outlaw were trying to scrape off the boy.

Once more Shack staggered past, with the infuriated idiot riding astride, and plying the blade. Adrien saw them no more; from a groaning of the boards and a violent

thumping against the wall, he knew that the struggle still went on. Then came a heavy fall and a brief scuffle on the floor. After that there was a silence, a stillness profound and more nerve-racking than their deadly strife had been.

Adrien did not stir, holding his breath to listen. He heard nothing. That must be the end. It could only end in one way. Shack's powerful arms would tear the boy loose and choke the life out of him. Possibly that was happening now. Adrien could hear a breath that came in gasps, a gurgle.

He struggled to free himself, to overthrow the chair, to crawl to the door. The halter was old and soft, and the knots would not loosen. He succeeded in overturning his chair, but fell helpless, wriggling inch by inch toward the door.

So far he got, and no farther. Baxter had tied the rope around the bed. Adrien lay straining and listening until the scraping on the floor outside had ceased. The hard breathing and the gurgling came no more; silence fell—utter, intense, appalling silence.

Suddenly, more suddenly than Will had appeared, his pipes pealed forth again in a screaming crescendo of barbaric triumph. Up and up went those ever-climbing hosannas of the pipes, more jubilant than the song of the lark that mounts toward the sun.

The first shrill note chilled Adrien's blood; the next turned every drop to fire, bounding and burning through his veins. His muscles tautened to their utmost, but his bonds would not give way. He could move no farther. He was spending his strength in folly.

Then he lay still and listened. Not a sound, but the madness of the pipes! Beyond were the droning voices of the twilight, the crickets, and the frogs. The gurgle and struggle, all else, had ended. Old Shack must be dead.

"Will! Oh, Will!" Adrien ventured to call.

No answer. The pipes poured forth gloriously. Adrien lifted his voice and shouted:

"Will, come here! For Heaven's sake help me!"

There was no halting of the music, no intimation that the idiot heard. Adrien worked frantically, dragged back to the bed, got the halter's end in his teeth. The

knots were hastily tied; they would give way to time and patience, but he had neither the patience nor the time. He struggled like a demon, writhing, turning, twisting. Five men were coming from Dunnaway's with a steady mule to bear his body to the river.

"Will! Will!" he shrieked.

Will never took those accursed pipes from his lips. With agonizing slowness Adrien felt the knots relax about the rungs of his chair. He wriggled one of his legs free and hobbled into the hall, carrying the chair with him. Turning out of the door, he stumbled and fell across Old Shack's body—stone dead. A shuddering frenzy overcame him, gnashing at the ropes, imploring the idiot.

Will grinned with delight at Adrien's singular contortions. There lay the knife where Will had dropped it, beside the dead man. Adrien rolled over, clutched the handle, and cut the ropes wherever he could reach them. He stood erect, bruised in every joint and muscle, but free—free!

"He! He!" the idiot laughed.

XXXVIII

PROMPT decision in emergencies had gained for Captain de Valence the admiration of the gallant Texan army. Happy chance and the idiot had aided him. Now he must help himself, and be more than prompt about it.

Stamping to restore circulation, he rubbed his chafed wrists and looked at Old Shack, lying face downward, with arms outspread. Will o' the Woods sat outside, flat upon the ground, piping his exultation.

To Adrien the dead body presented a problem. When the men came back from Dunnaway's, it would invite instant pursuit. Perhaps if he and Shack were *both* missing, the outlaws might wait their chief's return.

Adrien decided swiftly and moved with speed. First he brought one horse from the corn-crib then got the other, leaving none for his pursuers.

"Come, Will," he called; "help me lift Old Shack across this horse."

The idiot nodded mockingly, as if he comprehended, but refused to stir. Adrien balanced the body and tied it across the saddle. A hurried search developed two excellent rifles, which he carried with him, and stuffed an extra pair of pistols into his saddle-bag. Other weapons were tossed

into the nearest ravine. Before starting, he scratched two words on a piece of paper, in cipher—"Wait here"—signing the message with Shack's well-known symbol. He placed the paper on a chair in the middle of the hallway.

Leading two horses, De Valence left the log cabin and hurried toward the shanty-boat. Will rose solemnly and marched ahead, piping a rude, triumphant dirge, as if before some Norse chieftain who had fallen in victorious battle.

"Go back, Will! Stop that noise!"

There was no use arguing with the lack-wit. Adrien quickened the horses. If Baxter obeyed orders, it might be three-quarters of an hour before he returned from Dunnaway's. Finding his note instead of their leader, the outlaws would probably lose time at Baxter's cabin. A good skiff lay moored beside the shanty-boat, and darkness was falling upon the river.

Straight as a martin to its gourd, Adrien led his horse to the shanty-boat, where he dumped Shack's body on deck. Then he stopped to consider. The spade reminded him, the cypress-stump tempted him, and he yielded.

To secure the box would consume only a few moments; he decided to risk it. Will sat on top of the bank, still playing. Adrien tried to snatch his whistles. The idiot capered out of reach and grimaced. Adrien could not kill the boy or silence him. He seized the spade and ran to the cypress-stump. Hastily uncovering his father's box, he brought it first to the boat.

"Might as well get it all," he muttered, and stumbled back with the keg of gold.

Last, he fetched the other box, smaller and lighter than the keg. This occupied a surprisingly short time, and he was ready to cast off. The swift current of the Yazoo would help him to reach the Mississippi before morning. Upon its broad expanse there was little danger of a shot from the shore. The Yazoo, much narrower, and quite dark, offered many hiding-places among the willows.

As a final precaution, Adrien stripped the horses, throwing saddles and bridles into the river. As he lifted the plank to drag it aboard, Will darted across without interrupting his music. The shanty-boat drifted into midstream; the skiff bumped against its side. Will sat on a whisky-barrel and piped gloatingly over his fallen foe. That whistling must be hushed. The

river was doubtless guarded, and they might run into a nest of outlaws.

Adrien tried to interest the idiot in something else. With rags found in the cabin he muffled two pairs of oars—good, strong oars they were.

"Now, Will, come along and pull the skiff. Let's run away and hide!"

Will nodded delightedly, put aside his whistles, and jumped into the skiff. With the ease of an accomplished waterman, he pulled a long and noiseless stroke. Through the stillness and the shadows the skiff slipped on, towing the shanty-boat with a dead man's conspiracy and a dead man's bloody gold.

It was long past midnight when the waters broadened, and stars blinked serenely upon the boundless Mississippi. The Yazoo current swept them over toward the Louisiana shore. There they beached their boats upon a sand-bar.

Adrien lay down in the skiff to rest. The tireless Will perched himself on top of the cabin, dangled his skinny legs above the dead man, and recommenced his whistling. Adrien fell asleep, secure as one who hears the barking of a wakeful terrier.

A round, white sun appeared above the eastern hills when Adrien climbed into the shanty-boat and searched Old Shack. The papers, watch, rings, everything that might serve for identification, he made into a package intended for Pibrac. His own papers and several hundred dollars in money Adrien put into his pocket. Will eyed him owlishly, sitting cross-legged on a whisky-barrel.

"Come on, Will," he suggested. "We are going to have a funeral."

The idiot laughed gleefully and jumped down to help. On the sandy point they scooped out a grave, straightened the dead man decently, and raised a little ridge. Adrien stood thoughtful. All about him was silence and the mellow sunshine; the peace of God murmured among the trees and scintillated upon a majestic sweep of waters. Involuntarily he bared his head.

"There lies the great conspiracy!" he thought.

In that shallow grave were buried forever the shallower designs of one whose talents might have benefited human kind.

The idiot tuned his pipes to a weird, barbaric requiem which lost itself in the vastness of the river and the woods. Adrien regarded him with something akin to rever-

ence as an unwitting instrument of divine justice.

"Come, Will; we must go."

They groped along the Louisiana shores until the battlements of Vicksburg came in sight, then made fast beneath the overhanging willows. It were more prudent to approach the town by night. The keg weighed upward of a hundred pounds; if the weight were all in gold, there would probably be thirty thousand dollars or more. This, with two other boxes, was more than one man could handle. Adrien must get help, and it would not come from Will.

While waiting for night, Adrien spent some time in debating what to do with Shack's money. He could not keep it himself. It must go to right the wrongs in which he had been concerned—to pay for the horses stolen from McCorkle, to reimburse the owners for the slaves that were sold to Welter, to provide for Jule, as the widow of Captain Ed. He would devote the remainder to preventing any possible consummation of Old Shack's Christmas plot. These directions he carefully wrote down, item by item, and put the paper in his pocket.

Now he felt free to pursue a personal affair.

"All's done," he said, "except—and I'll do that to-night!"

When lights twinkled from the courthouse on the hill, Adrien transferred his booty to the skiff and abandoned the shanty-boat. He meant to slip away and leave Will on the larger craft, but the idiot was too cunning, and scrambled into the skiff. There was no hurry. Will did the work, while Adrien rested on his oars, thinking and planning.

"It must be to-night—man to man. I shall return that miniature to Cecile." He smiled grimly, and wondered what the girl could find to say. "It shall be Captain de Valence against Buck Flint!"

Then he thought again, and longer. Greatly as he desired to shake himself free of that odious disguise, it was not possible—not yet. Somebody might be killed; if it were Trotter the obscure, it would raise no scandal. Having decided, Adrien put his strength behind his oars.

Silent as a nightbird they rounded the last bend and drifted in dark, smooth waters under the shadow of the bluffs. At the mouth of Glass's Bayou were the glow-

ing embers of the Kangaroo, burned to the ground, with prowlers prodding among its ruins. Their skiff stole along the city-front. Just below, at the point where Cabler had been set adrift, a crowd was gathered, with torches. Adrien dodged inshore, beside a dismantled barge.

The instant his skiff touched the bank, a hand seized its prow and a harsh voice ordered:

"Climb out of there, sport; we knowed you was comin' back."

"What do you want?"

"Jest you; we ain't p'tickler 'bout nobody else. Got here in good time to make yo' part o' the fun!"

A dozen men appeared from behind the black hulk of the barge. Several lanterns flickered upon their rifle-barrels.

"No use skirmishin' aroun'—jest step right out o' that skiff. Who's that you got with you."

"He! He! He!" Will laughed.

"Oh, that daffy boy. Git out!"

"Hole up, Jim," a voice suggested. "Cap wants to see what he's got in that boat."

Jim dragged the skiff along, while the others marched beside.

"We've ketched him, cap," Jim called ahead. A number of figures came running from the crowd at the foot of Jackson Street. Jim addressed one of them. "Cap, we knowed he'd come a sneakin' back. Tumble out o' there, sport!"

As Adrien stepped ashore, Jim lifted a lantern, and the officer peered into his face. It was Lieutenant Vincent, who had previously arrested Buck Flint.

"This man is not Sid Crane!" Vincent's tone of disgust expressed his disappointment.

"The devil it ain't!" Jim exploded. "Who is he?"

"What's your name?" Vincent demanded of Adrien.

"Tom Trotter."

"What's in that boat?"

"A keg of nails, carpenters' tools, and a box o' candles."

"Does anybody know this man?" Lieutenant Vincent asked his question of the crowd. No one vouched for the stranger. "Better hold him, boys, until we dispose of these other fellows. Bring the skiff along."

Bearing their prisoner, they joined a larger crowd, in the center of which stood

a grotesque, dispirited figure panoplied with tar and feathers.

"Hurry up, friends"—he gagged at the bad medicine—"hurry up, friends; I'm powerful anxious to leave this here town."

"Cap, what must we do with this'n?" some one asked.

Adrien glanced around and recognized Gid Barlow—not the dressy, immaculate Gid, but a limp creature of dust and tatters, his frilly shirt much soiled, his face besmeared. Barlow hung his head and glanced furtively at the officer. Vincent hesitated.

"Well, boys, nobody knows him, and we don't want to do any man an injustice. Give him a chance at the dirt road, and let him go."

Adrien spoke up without thinking of the possible consequences:

"That's Gid Barlow, the professional gambler of New Orleans."

"Gid Barlow!" exclaimed Vincent. "The worst of a bad lot! Are you certain?"

"Perfectly sure."

Barlow wheeled.

"Cap, you can't believe that feller. He's Tom Trotter, alias Tom Beasley, horse-thief, run out o' Virginia with two hundred dollars' reward on his head."

"That's right, cap; that's right!" Jim eagerly caught at the main idea. "He jes' give his name as Tom Trotter; don't I git that two hundred?"

Vincent looked from one man to the other.

"I can prove it," Barlow insisted viciously, reaching into his pocket. "Here's the reward paper."

By the light of his lantern Vincent read Pibrac's handbill, and compared its description with the man.

"Fits him to a gnat's heel! Here, bring some more tar, another log. Strip him, boys!"

"Hole up, cap, hole up." Jim caught Vincent by the arm. "I ketched this feller, an' I can't affode to be chucking two hundred dollars into the river."

Adrien seized the lieutenant's momentary indecision.

"If you will send for Lynn Worthington, he can identify me."

"Jim, call Mr. Worthington—he's on that first barge."

Adrien touched Vincent's sleeve and whispered:

"Lieutenant, would you kindly go with me before Mr. Worthington, alone, so that no one else may hear what he says?"

Worthington came up promptly. With low-voiced discretion, and no calling of names, he identified his friend.

"Vincent, I know him well, and know his business here. He is rendering us a great service."

"Very well; take charge of him yourself until I get through with this job."

After this whispered consultation, Worthington called a dray and helped unload the skiff. Adrien handled the keg, to avoid comment upon its excessive weight. Then the drayman refused to budge until he had seen all the fun.

Duly elected committees overwhelmed Gid Barlow with attention, lavishing tar upon his head and rolling him generously in feathers.

"Now, then, Mr. Gid Barlow, we'll give you a runnin' start todes home. Our treat, free ticket; but remember, the old Mississippi don't never come up stream!"

Barlow's courage was gone, and he clung despairingly to his log. The other sportsman took it as part of the game, and waved his hand in friendliest fashion.

"Brace up, Gid; mought be a heap wuss ef 'twas January 'stead o' July. Good-by, fellers, take keer o' yourselves!"

This speculator rejoiced in the luck that got him away with unperforated skin and unstretched neck.

One on either side of the dray, Lynn and Adrien climbed the long hill at Grove Street.

"What kind o' plunder is this?" Lynn inquired, as he lifted the smaller box into his office.

Adrien did not reply, spending his breath on that heavy keg.

While Worthington busied himself in making a light, Adrien found his letter from Cecile, sat down, and read it through twice. Lynn fidgeted about the room. The letter was dated from Port Gibson, and made no mention whatever of her coming to Vicksburg. Adrien stuffed it into his pocket and rose.

"Lynn"—he spoke harshly and without feeling—"Lynn, take good care of that biggest box. If anything should happen to me, send it to my father at once. He is visiting Judge Kinlock, near Natchez."

"If anything happens to you? What can happen now? This town is as quiet

as a graveyard. We hanged Dick Hullum and his gang, chased the others away to be hanged somewhere else, burned up the Kangaroo—made a clean sweep. Here endeth the first lesson!"

Adrien acted queerly, as if he had not heard.

"This is the box—this big one. Send it to my father, at Judge Kinlock's, near Natchez."

He laid his hand upon the door-knob to go out, when Lynn stopped him.

"What is this other stuff, and who does it belong to?"

"Oh, I forgot; that belongs to me, I suppose, by right of capture."

"What's in it?"

"I don't know what's in that little box; the keg is full of money."

Adrien spoke dully, as if it did not interest him.

"Money? Whose money?" Worthington asked.

"It belonged to Old Shack."

"Old Shack? Do you mean the man called Shackleford Orr?" Worthington trembled with excitement. "The scoundrel who is said to have planned this insurrection? We only learned to-day that he had been here in Vicksburg. It's a pity he got away!"

"Old Shack never got away."

"*Didn't get away?*"

"No, I buried him this morning on a sand-bar. Here's a description of the place." Adrien laid a paper on the table. "Will o' the Woods knows exactly where it is."

While Lynn stood staring, Adrien opened the door. Lynn sprang forward and caught him with both hands.

"You buried Shackleford Orr? Tell me about it."

"Let me go, Lynn; I've got something else to do."

"You are not going until you tell me that."

"Nothing to tell; he's buried—there's some of his plunder. And send this packet to that address—M. Félicien Pibrac, Rue Burgundy, New Orleans."

"I'm going to see what's in the keg."

With a hatchet that lay on his hearth, Worthington knocked in the head of the keg, and lifted out those long buckskin bags of gold. The young lawyer stood dazed and dumfounded. Adrien seemed irritated.

"Now you see what's in it—let me go."

"What's in that small box?"

Adrien said nothing. Lynn answered himself by breaking it open, exposing a miscellaneous lot of jewelry and watches, the spoils of many a murder.

"Vally, what are you going to with this?"

"Leave it here; you can advertise for the owners, if you like." Then Adrien remembered, and sat down restlessly upon the edge of a chair. "Lynn, I forgot; I want you to do something else." He took from his pocket the scrap of paper upon which he had noted a distribution of Old Shack's money. Item by item he explained it to Worthington. "There must be thirty or forty thousand dollars. If anything happens to me, you must use it in squaring up. Pay this man McCorkle for his horses. Trace those negroes that were sold to Welter. Pay the heirs of Captain Ed Rial for his barge and cargo—here's a list, with full directions. Did a boy bring you a note from me?"

"Yes, a boy called Skinny. I've been looking after him and his aunt."

"That's the woman; Jule claims to be the widow of Captain Ed. If this is true, you can use your own discretion about giving her the money, or investing it for her. Take care of the boy. As to the balance of the money, consult with Pibrac, and do what's best."

Adrien talked hurriedly and jerkily, grudging the time consumed by every word. Worthington braced himself against the door.

"Vally, you can't go away like that. What is going to happen? Where are you going? Wash that stuff from your face—be yourself!"

"No; there's something for me to do to-night—and *I will do it*."

De Valence forced his way through the door, and left Worthington gazing at the keg, at the boxes, and then at his friend, who rushed into the night.

XXXIX

THE clock in the drug-store pointed to half past nine.

"It may not be too late," Adrien muttered, striding rapidly up the long hill, lashed by a fear that Buck Flint might already be gone.

At the level of new Cherry Street squatted the red brick court-house, dark and

dingy and deserted. Adrien hurried on to the graveyard road, and paused only once—at the place where Dick Hullum had jumped the fence. That speck against the farther hillside was the cabin in which Flint had captured Hullum.

Flint's gate stood open; a light burned in the right-hand room. Adrien approached noiselessly and peered in at the window.

Flint was alone, with the bandage about his head, reading quietly in the big chair, just where Cecile had been sitting. Adrien's piercing black eyes, which nothing could alter or disguise, fastened themselves upon the placid man. On the table—he could see it very plainly—was that sparkling miniature, with all of Cecile's glorious coloring.

Captain Adrien de Valence would have burst in at the front door; Tom Trotter, the fugitive horse-thief, sneaked around to the kitchen, as he had done before, and tried the knob. The kitchen door was unlocked. The location of every piece of furniture being clearly in his mind, he jostled nothing, passing through kitchen, dining-room, and hall without making a sound. Once again he stood glaring in at the same door.

For a moment Adrien imagined Cecile's voice reading to that insolent gambler propped upon the pillows; another moment and Flint looked up into the ugly iron ring at the end of a pistol-barrel. Behind it, in semidarkness, stood a rigid man. Flint could only see a freckled hand and the glitter of steel.

"What do you want?" Flint demanded with unruffled composure. There were qualities about this gambler which compelled admiration.

A long arm reached out from the darkness and removed Flint's pistol, tossing it up on the bed.

"What do you want?"

"This!"

The intruder's freckled hand took up Cecile's miniature. Flint had the effrontery to smile—the irritatingly superior smile of a man who is absolutely master of himself.

"Be so kind as not to disturb me. You'll find a few dollars and my watch in that top drawer. Please do not tumble up things. There is nothing else of value in the house."

"I don't want your money."

"No money? Then take whatever else may seem desirable. It's quite the fashion to strip a gambler."

Flint never shifted from his comfortable attitude, merely glancing over his shoulder and speaking quietly. The intruder was disconcerted; the pistol wavered. Then the outstretched arm steadied itself and held the ugly muzzle firm. De Valence knew that the man before him was quick-witted, strong-nerved, resourceful, and keen for any chance to turn the advantage in a deadly game. Adrien watched him closely and suspiciously.

"I want nothing but this."

"And do you imagine I shall let you have it?"

At the coolness of this question the muzzle wobbled again. "I shall take it without asking."

"So I perceive, but"—Flint straightened up in his chair, closed the book, and kept his fingers between its pages—"may I inquire how you purpose leaving my house with my property?"

This suggested a difficulty that was apparent to the man in darkness, as the uncertainty of his voice betrayed.

"I shall go as I came."

"Quite easy to say. What do you suppose I shall do the moment you have lowered that pistol?"

There was no threat in Flint's voice. His manner was the pink of courteous consideration, as if he were simply pointing out a hole in the bridge and inquiring how the traveler meant to get across.

Adrien had never thought about that; he had only thought of seizing the miniature. Plainly Flint would not permit him to leave without a protest. On two occasions he had witnessed a protest from this man; they had been serious. The instant Adrien backed out of that door Flint would be up and armed and following. Under the circumstances Adrien could not run; he must stop and fight.

Flint eyed him with a smile of interested amusement, as if he read the workings of the other's mind.

"Stale-mate!" he remarked. "You cannot move, and you will not permit me to move."

Flint kept smiling into the threatening weapon on account of which he refrained from moving.

"I shall take the miniature," Adrien asserted again inconsequently.

"You have already taken it; you are quite free to go. I should open the door for you myself, but—" He nodded and smiled at the pistol.

The man in the shadow stood perfectly still, trying to think of some other way. Cordially as he hated this gambler, De Valence could not murder him. Flint was gaining time and undermining his antagonist's resolution. Adrien felt all that, but could see no way.

"Pardon my curiosity." Flint laid his book upon the table, with a paper-knife between its leaves. "Pardon my feminine curiosity—why should you take such desperate chances to get that picture? It might bring us into conflict which we should both deplore. Permit me a personal observation—I should imagine that a man in your apparent circumstances would greatly prefer to take money."

Flint's attitude expressed nothing more than a polite inquisitiveness, as if weary of reading and mildly entertained by something which did not concern him.

"Shall I get the money for you?" he suggested, half rising.

"Sit down."

"As you please. But why should you want my picture?"

"I have a right to it."

"Ah, indeed, a right! Now that we talk of right and wrong, there is something tangible for us to discuss. Really, sir, it puts me ill at ease to see you standing while I am seated in my own house. Pray have a chair. Ah, you prefer to stand—to be eccentric."

As yet Buck Flint had not seen the face in the shadow. The light shone upon an unwavering muzzle, a freckled hand gripping the butt, and a muscular forearm. That was all Flint saw.

"I admit, sir, that you began the argument with substantial advantages—possession of the property, which is nine points of the law. The great Napoleon always maintained that the Almighty was on the side of the heaviest artillery. By the way, do you admire Napoleon? I propose to you a wager. If your right to that picture is better than mine you may go in peace. If not—"

"I shall take it, anyhow."

Flint shrugged his shoulders.

"Sorry sport—a wager in which I have no chance to win. Very well, you may go; but be not so discourteous as to leave my

curiosity unappeased. Why should you sneak at my back door and present a pistol to my head? Why should you refuse money and content yourself with a work of art? And yet—most unaccountable fact—you are unwilling to shoot me, which may be done with entire safety. I confess a bewilderment. Why, for the sake of a mere picture, should you become an assassin without the nerve to complete your work, a robber who dares not rob, a murderer lacking resolution to kill? Why should you do these singular things?"

Adrien did not answer. He could not answer. It required all his determination to hold his pistol steady.

"Now"—Flint's tone expressed a sort of chivalric generosity—"now that you will not use your advantage and take by force, I shall give it freely—if *your right be superior to mine!*"

"She is my betrothed wife."

De Valence could have bitten off his tongue for saying it. Again Flint shrugged his shoulders.

"An error—you have no claim whatever upon this lady." Adrien's lips tightened, his resolution strengthened, his fingers toyed with the trigger. Flint looked up quietly. "This lady was my mother."

"Your mother?"

"Yes, Captain de Valence, she was my mother, and the mother of Cecile."

"Then you are Cecile's—"

"Brother—Alan Kinlock."

"But I never knew—" Adrien dropped limply into the chair, his futile weapon falling upon the table. "Cecile never spoke of a brother."

"No," Flint explained, without resentment. "Judge Kinlock cast me off. He was right; I bring no credit to the name. He never mentioned me, and forbade her to do so; but she's a loyal sister, and came when she thought I was in need."

Adrien sat staring into the vague corners of the room, seeing clearly. He rose.

"I shall go to her this night—at once."

"Go; and, by Heaven, some day I shall go to her myself—a day when she shall be proud that Alan Kinlock is her brother. Captain de Valence, I have wasted my life and disgraced my name. The events of this past week have convinced me of it; but I shall make amends."

"Come with me to Texas. The cause of liberty needs such men. General Houston is my friend."

Alan Kinlock grasped the other's hand. "I'll go!"

Before many months the name of Alan Kinlock had become a household word in the new republic, a name for sturdy sires to boast of to their sons.

Adrien was turning to go. He asked:

"You knew me—when I came in?"

"No; I thought you a common thief; there are plenty of them in Vicksburg. When you seized the miniature I suspected, and forced you to talk. Cecile told me you were here in disguise. How have you fared?"

Adrien relaxed and told what had happened. Flint exclaimed:

"Old Shack killed? Will o' the Woods deserves a monument!"

"Yes." Adrien thought not of Shack, nor of Will o' the Woods, nor yet of monuments. "I am going to *her* this very night!"

Alan Kinlock took a sudden resolution.

"I shall go with you—back to my home, to my father, and to my sister!"

Through the night the two horsemen rode out of Vicksburg, traveling toward Natchez on Alan Kinlock's thoroughbreds. Tom Trotter had not one of them. Trotter had done his work; his sandy hair, his freckles, and his drawl no longer existed. Captain Adrien de Valence rode with head erect, avoiding no man's eye. On his saddle he carried a heavy box, which he shifted at times to Kinlock's pommel.

From the same front steps of Kinlock Hall the same poplars formed the same two lines on either side of the same avenue. The same shadows went creeping across the same lawn, invading the same old burial-ground. Nothing had changed. All things were as they had been on the evening when the marshal's iron box was taken.

No thieves slipped out from among those gray-cemented tombs; no covetous eyes glared from behind the parlor curtains.

THE END.

Two burly Normans in the hallway watched over a group that gathered around the library table—but they watched with love and joy, Gontran and Riom being soldier-servants, comrades in arms, and stanch friends.

Again the old marshal lifted the lid of the iron box. Alan Kinlock looked on eagerly; his father's face shone with pride at a gallant son's return.

"Adrien, here is *your* task." The Duc de Valence took a glittering coronet from the box. "Your mother wore this at the coronation of the great emperor. You and she"—bowing proudly to Cecile—"you and she must accept your rightful place, side by side, in the splendid retinues of France."

Adrien's hand was steady and his face very grave as he set that jeweled coronet, with all of its responsibilities, upon her girlish brow. Cecile stood somewhat apart, smiling gloriously.

Gontran and Riom entered, like feudal retainers doing their homage, and together saluted "Mme. la Duchesse de Valence." Cecile looked puzzled; she hadn't thought of that, and her smile faded. It was very serious, being a duchess.

The marshal turned.

"Adrien, my lad, and you, my good friends, Gontran and Riom, be not downcast; Pibrac sends tidings that our news from France was a canard. The prince has not risen. We must bide our time with fortitude."

The old marshal straightened himself proudly, as a warrior who disdains to cower beneath a blow. Cecile moved to her lover's side, seeking to temper the bitterness of his disappointment. Adrien bent over and whispered:

"We remain in America. This shall be my country. Here is man's work for men—and *you*!"

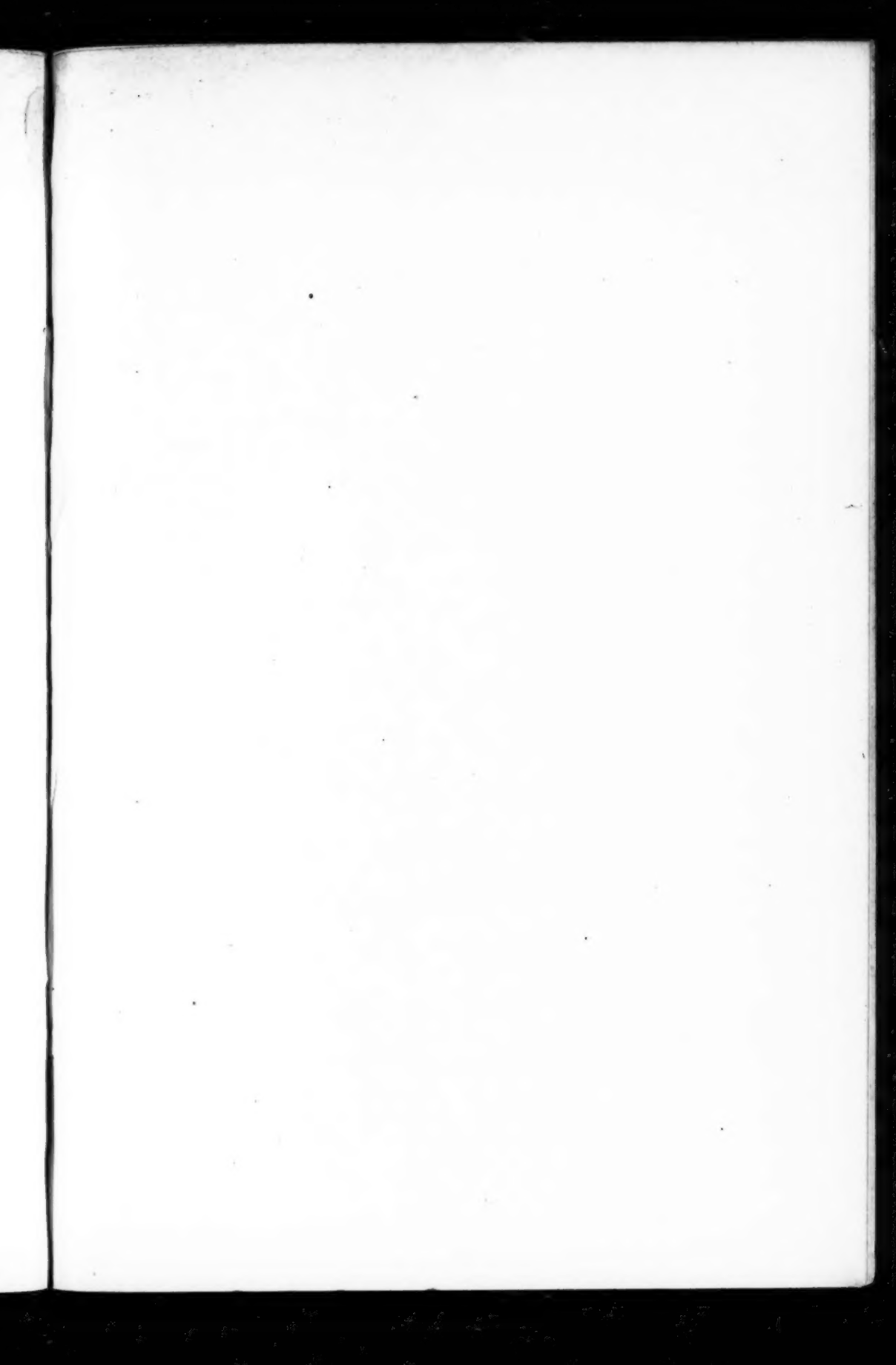
"I'm so glad; so glad!"

Forgetful of coronet and responsibilities, Cecile rested her head contentedly upon his shoulder.

HAPPINESS

BRIGHT is the sunlight on the fields and closes,
Where fragrant flowers their velvet petals part;
But what the golden glow, the wealth of roses,
If happiness dwells not within the heart?

Archibald Crombie





SHE SNATCHED THE BOX FROM HIM AND THREW IT FAR OUT IN THE WATER

Drawn by E. M. Ashe

[See story, "The Mated Rubies," page 799]